

Chronicles

September 1999

A MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN CULTURE

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Mary Pride
on the
Future of
American
Education

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Chronicles

A MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN CULTURE



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POLEMICS & EXCHANGES

On Federalism and Flag-Burning

The Supreme Court, in the case of *Johnson v. Texas*, arrogated to the federal government the power to decide that all states must allow the public burning of the federal government's flag. This decision clearly contradicted both the near-unanimous understanding of previous Supreme Court justices, including such constitutional nihilists as Chief Justice Earl Warren and Justice Hugo Black, and the much-maligned "original understanding" of the issue.

Regarding the "original understanding," two of the three leading Federalist delegates to the Virginia ratification convention, Governor Edmund Randolph and George Nicholas (James Madison's chief spokesman), explicitly told their fellow delegates that the instrument by which they proposed to ratify the Constitution would leave future Virginians the power to reclaim their entire delegation of authority to the new government in the event that the federal government undertook to intervene in speech-related matters in any way. James Madison and John Marshall, two of the other four members of the committee that reported the ratification instrument, sat mute through this explication—thus signaling their assent.

Stephen B. Presser (*Cultural Revolutions*, June) suggests that the proper response to decisions such as *Johnson* is not nullification or secession, but granting new powers to the federal legislature. That is exactly what his proposed amendment, which would give Congress alone the states' pre-*Johnson* power to ban public disrespect of the flag, would do. Surely, this is rewarding the fox for raiding the henhouse! Under Article III, Section 2, of the Constitution, Congress already can divest the Supreme Court of effective power in this area by simply stripping it of jurisdiction over appeals in cases involving the flag; the federal legislature should not be granted a new quantum of the states' reserved sovereignty for failing to check judicial legislation.

There is another—and better—reason not to endorse a "flag desecration [sic] amendment": The flag is not sacred. I can think of dozens of things one might hold sacred: Orthodox icons, the Holy

Bible, the Cross of Christ, relics of the saints, the writings of the Fathers of the Church, collections of the lives of the saints, etc. To have only one thing, and that the symbol of the federal government, recognized as "holy" by the federal government is really too much. It is simple blasphemy, as is any reference to "desecration" of the federal flag.

I am sure that Dr. Presser is animated by the best motives. Seeing yet more overreaching by the federal judiciary, he thinks, "Why not start to fence the judges in here?" I answer: Why not simply defend the states' reserved right to legislate exclusively in all matters such as this?

—K.R. Constantine Gutzman
Charlottesville, VA

Dr. Presser Replies:

K.R. Constantine Gutzman's points are well taken, and I agree that the growth of the federal leviathan and the diminishment of the constitutionally guaranteed powers of the states are important issues which ought to be addressed. Nevertheless, I part company with him over the suggestion that passage of the Flag Protection Amendment would exacerbate the problem. He appears to believe that passing the amendment would give Congress a power to regulate speech which it did not before possess, but the point is that flag desecration is not speech, never has been, and never will be. He is correct that, before the 1989 *Johnson* decision, the states—as well as the federal government—had laws against flag desecration; the amendment would only restore the federal government's power in this regard. Like him, I would favor a measure that restored the pre-1989 powers of the states as well, but I'm willing to settle for this particular amendment at this time.

Passage of the Flag Protection Amendment would reward the efforts of the 49 state legislatures which have petitioned Congress, and the amendment would, in the end, have to be ratified by the state legislatures, acting for the people of their states. The measure is a reaffirmation of grassroots popular sovereignty, and it would be brought into the Constitution ultimately by the actions of the states, so I see the amendment as a reinforcement of the people's power to control their Con-

stitution through their state governments.

A more delicate matter is Gutzman's assertion that "the flag is not sacred." The pieces of cloth themselves are not sacred, of course, but what the flag represents to many Americans—the sacrifice of the lives and limbs of loved ones to preserve American liberty—is surely sacred, in the same sense that the signers of the Declaration pledged their "sacred" honor. No society that has ever survived has not held some aspects of nationhood sacred, and about 80 percent of the American people, led by their veterans organizations, seem to be showing this by their support for the amendment.

Finally, I appreciate Gutzman's suggestion that those of us who support the

amendment are "animated by the best motives," in particular reigning in an overreaching federal judiciary. While Gutzman sees the Flag Protection Amendment as "rewarding the fox for raiding the henhouse," I see it rather as using the federal government for an appropriate purpose—to restore a liberty lost to the American people to preserve and protect the national symbol and properly to glorify the sacrifice of those who fought for our way of life. An important aspect of that way of life, which Gutzman and I would both agree the Bill of Rights was designed to protect, was self-government, principally through state and local bodies. We would also both agree that the federal courts have, of

late, often failed to understand this, as they have often failed to understand that in our society responsibility (and self-government) are as fundamentally important as individual rights. I am not yet ready to see nullification or secession as the preferred means of bringing the federal courts back to where they should be, and I think, for now, that the people should have an opportunity to take back their Constitution through amendment. That was the original plan of Washington, Hamilton, Madison, and Jay, after all—that the Constitution ought to be preserved and protected by amendment—and we honor their memory by making the effort.

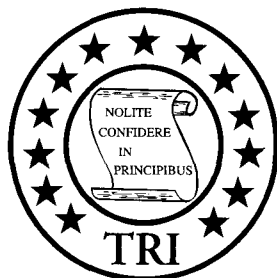
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BORIS YELTSIN, so the conventional wisdom goes, is an impulsive Slavic peasant whose motives are as inscrutable as the enigma that is Russia. Some, probably most, observers also think Yeltsin is crazy. Not crazy like the holy fools of old Russia or the smug suits who make NATO policy. No, Yeltsin is simply considered senile or losing his mind to alcoholic dementia. Neither view is quite right, as the unexpected and shocking—to the neatly pressed pretty boys and girls of NATO and CNN—dash of Russian troops into Kosovo in June demonstrated. The Russian *blitzkrieg* short-circuited the talks on Russia's projected "role" in Kosovo by forcing the issue: Russia would take part in the "peacekeeping" mission on her own terms, remaining—*de facto* if not *de jure*—outside the NATO command structure.

CNN, the wire service of the New World Order, was apoplectic, and the "Iron Lady" of the State Department was so mad she was quaking in her combat boots. The West had expected Russia to play along: After all, that was part of the deal. Viktor Chernomyrdin, the stalking horse of oligarch-in-chief Boris Beresovsky, had supposedly boosted his chances of becoming Boris I's anointed successor by pressuring Milosevic to cave in and allow NATO to occupy Kosovo, which made Chernomyrdin's pal Al Gore happy. In return, the allegedly non-political IMF would cough up more money to the Kremlin kleptocracy, buying it time to calculate how to hang on to power after Yeltsin's departure in 2000. They should have known better.

Russian media boasted that the move into Kosovo had saved the nation's collective face, preserved Russia as a great power, and shown the West that the Balkans lie within Moscow's sphere of influence. NATO could just forget becoming policeman—or mugger—of the world. What remained unclear, however, was just who gave the order for the 200 Russian airborne troops to move into Kosovo. Both Chernomyrdin and the Foreign Ministry had clearly been out of the loop on this one. Did the generals make the decision on their own? Or was one pickled lobe of Yeltsin's brain—the one that translates his uncommonly strong will to power into the intrigues he is justly known for—still working? A few observers claimed (correctly, in my view)

that the fading Yeltsin was still functioning, albeit for brief periods, and will be dragged kicking and screaming—if not in a body bag—from the Kremlin. Boris I does not intend for anybody, especially Chernomyrdin, Beresovsky, Gore, and "friend Bill," to forget just who is the boss in Russia and grandmaster of the post-Cold War Great Game, deal or no deal.

Sergei Kurginyan, a nutty theater director and sometime political strategist for Gorbachev, the "patriotic" anti-Yeltsin coalition, and Beresovsky, had warned against counting Yeltsin out of the game. In a rambling, semi-coherent, and extremely Russian essay (he is a Russified Armenian) published in the newspaper *Slovo* in May, Kurginyan slammed the "myth" of Yeltsin's total incapacity and predicted that the president still had a few surprises in store for both the West and the "family," the parasitic collection of courtiers, oligarchs, and relatives who make up what Russian journalists call the "collective Yeltsin." Yeltsin, wrote Kurginyan, is a self-absorbed "political animal" who operates in the postmodern realm beyond good and evil. "With unerring reactions with respect to his own interests, absolutely blinkered with respect to anything else" and a "ferocity" in battle that his opponents cannot match, the postmodern "political animal" does not need to work "18 hours a day" but only a few hours a week to read the tea leaves and plot his next move.

The model for understanding Yeltsin and Kremlin politics is not—as Yeltsin would like the West to believe—Konrad Adenauer and post-war Germany, but Russia in the period bridging the end of the Great Patriotic War and the rise of Khrushchev. Then, an aging and ailing "political animal" clung to power until his death, leaving his country with no apparent successor, tense relations with the West, and in a state of demographic, economic, and social disaster. Hatching plots until the end, his hapless victims seldom knew what hit them. Trusting nobody, the political animal's will to power remained his only companion, the only voice his fading mind could still hear.

—Denis Petrov

THE U.S. SUPREME COURT ended its October 1998 term on June 23, the

earliest closing date in 30 years. Anthony Lewis, writing in the *New York Times*, declared that the term "showed us a phenomenon that this country has not seen for more than 60 years: a band of radical judicial activists determined to impose on the Constitution their notion of a proper system of government." The *Wall Street Journal* observed blandly that the Court was engaged in "an important effort to restore the balance between state power and federal power" and that "the Constitution doesn't permit Congress to order the states around willy-nilly." Who got it right?

The three decisions that had set off Mr. Lewis concerned whether states are immune from suit by aggrieved individuals, pursuant to the ancient doctrine of "sovereign immunity." The Court had ruled that they were. Sovereign immunity for the states was clearly a part of our jurisprudence at the time of the Constitution, and a cautious return to that doctrine should really set off no alarms. It is not as if we don't have enough litigation clogging our courts already, and there are other means of redress available, through state or federal legislation or administrative action, or through court actions brought by the federal government. The *Wall Street Journal* has the better of the argument.

In general, the October 1998 term was a good one for believers in the rule of law, although too many decisions were by slim five to four majorities. It is hardly reassuring that the future of constitutional government in our republic rests on the discretion of Sandra Day O'Connor, the justice who most frequently shifts between the bloc of "conservatives" (Rehnquist, Scalia, Thomas, and Kennedy), and the bloc of "liberals" (Stevens, Souter, Breyer, and Ginsburg). Justice O'Connor was with the conservatives on the three key state sovereign immunity decisions, but still voted with the liberals to reverse a lower federal court and declare that state school districts could be sued for failing to prevent elementary school students from sexually harassing each other. Only Justice O'Connor knows how these positions can be reconciled.

Even so, Justice O'Connor wrote a fine majority opinion in a case rejecting the Clinton administration's plan to use statistical sampling when conducting the

2000 census. Since this count is used to determine congressional representation, many Republicans feared statistical sampling would be used to create more districts where Democrats could win. Justice O'Connor correctly pointed out that the words of the Constitution expressly call for an "actual" enumeration for the purposes of determining congressional districts, but the marvel was that four Supreme Court justices still believed that statistical sampling was permissible.

The *Wall Street Journal*, quoting Prof. Jonathan Turley of George Washington University, noted that one might say, based on recent Supreme Court decisions, that the "federalism revolution" was under way. Turley was my law student, so I believe him to be a particularly astute court critic, but the "federalism revolution" still has not succeeded. Anthony Lewis has not really seen any "radical" behavior yet. What would be radical? When will the "federalism revolution" be won?

If real state sovereignty, as contemplated by the Framers, is actually to be restored, it would require the abandonment of the "selective incorporation"

doctrine, by which the 14th Amendment has been read by the Supreme Court to impose the restrictions of bits and pieces of the first eight amendments on the states. The Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the Constitution, was designed by its framers to be a safeguard against the federal government, because of the fear that a federal leviathan would obliterate state and local governments. Since the 1920's, however, the Supreme Court has concluded that the 14th Amendment's prohibitions that no state shall deprive any person of the "equal protection" of the laws, or that no state shall deprive any person of life or liberty without "due process," means, somehow, that state actions are subject to nullification by federal courts in matters of speech and press, in the administration of criminal law, in state educational programs, and in state laws regarding contraception and abortion—all areas the original understanding of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights would have marked out as the province of the states, not the federal government. It may be true that the Supreme Court has begun to understand that the Constitution "doesn't permit

Congress to order the states around willy-nilly," but while the "selective incorporation" doctrine survives, it will remain true that the Supreme Court and the other federal courts can do just that.

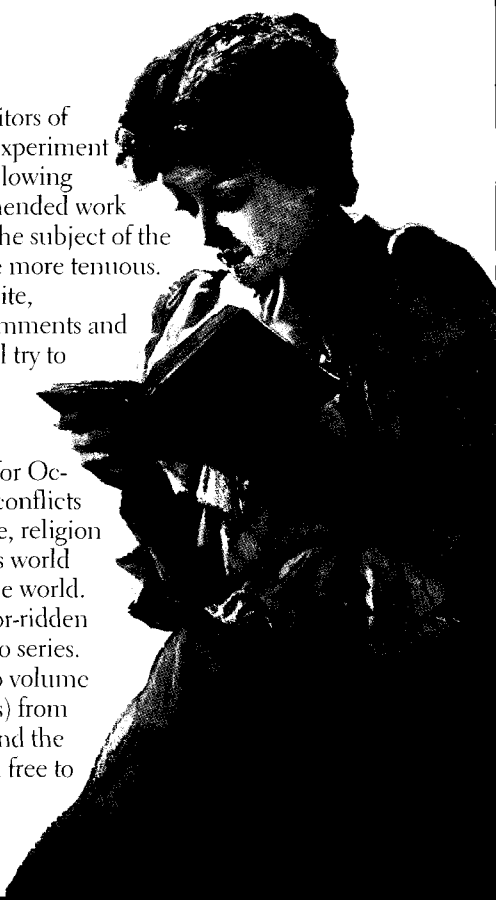
There is a slim historical foundation for both the "selective incorporation" doctrine and the "total incorporation" idea promoted by the late Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black. At the time of the passage of the 14th Amendment, one framer of that amendment, Congressman Bingham of New York, stated his belief that the "Bill of Rights" should protect state citizens, and one other framer, Senator Howard, did actually claim that the text of the amendment was designed to extend the protections of the first eight amendments against the state governments. But the 14th Amendment does not make this point expressly, and the words that amendment uses—"privileges and immunities," "equal protection," "due process"—appear to have other connotations. There is precious little, if any, contemporary evidence that the state ratifiers of the 14th Amendment understood that it was to work the radical deconstruction of federalism that the Supreme Court has accomplished over the last 60 years in its "selective incorporation" decisions. A few legal and constitutional historians—Raoul Berger is the most prominent example—have recently railed against the "selective incorporation" doctrine, and it was subject to powerful academic criticism a generation or so ago. Not one member of the Court's current "conservative" bloc has suggested doing away with the doctrine, however, and until that happens Mr. Lewis is simply crying "wolf."

—Stephen B. Presser

BOOK OF NEXT MONTH

In response to constant requests for recommendations on books, the editors of *Chronicles* have decided to try the experiment of recommending a book for the following month. In some cases, the recommended work will have a direct connection with the subject of the issue; in other cases, the link will be more tenuous. We will set aside space on our website, www.chroniclesmagazine.org, for comments and responses from readers, and we shall try to answer any questions of general interest.

Sophocles' *Antigone* is the work for October: a short play that exhibits the conflicts between the individual and the state, religion and government, the wisdom of this world and the everlasting laws of the divine world. Read any translation except the error-ridden volume in the University of Chicago series. Sir Hugh Lloyd-Jones's recent Loeb volume (Greek and English on facing pages) from Harvard is accurate and readable, and the Fitts and Fitzgerald version, though free to the point of recklessness, is dramatically effective.



EDMUND BURKE observed, two centuries ago, that "The power of perpetuating our property in our families is one of the most valuable and interesting circumstances belonging to it, and that which lends the most to the perpetuation of society itself."

In other words, all you grabby socialists, you confiscators of inherited property, keep your cotton-picking hands off other folks' hard-earned goods. Not that congressmen listen attentively to dead Irishmen. This is one main reason the exactions of the estate tax remain so sharp and painful; more so, these days, for the middle-class than for the mega-rich, with their mega-priced lawyers.

On the other hand, this sorry state of affairs may be changing. Whether or not congressmen listen to statesmen, they undeniably pay some attention to wrought-up voters. The words they are hearing about the estate tax grow angrier and angrier, and you know what anger can mean in politics.

Small wonder so many are ticked. The bull market on Wall Street has propelled into the ranks of the rich a lot of Americans who consider themselves, well, non-rich. The value of a 401(k) account, the instrument on which more and more Americans stake their financial futures, pushed up the value of the owner's estate.

And consider the rates: 37 percent for starters, rising to 55 percent. More than half. You get to give the feds more than half of what you own—this, for the high privilege of dying. No, you can't take it with you, but you used to be able to leave it behind, suitably distributed among loved ones. Today the feds start their self-apportionments from estate of more than \$650,000 (\$1 million in 2006).

Tom Riley writes in *Philanthropy* magazine:

In 1996, only about 3 percent of Americans who died were subject to estate tax. But that number is growing rapidly. Federal Reserve data suggest that over 6 percent of U.S. households have a net worth sufficient to subject them to the estate tax if they [sic] were to die today, and every uptick in the market adds new households to the club.

By 2004, the number of estate tax forms filed with the feds is expected to rise 52 percent—to 143,000. Particular victims include the owners of small businesses and family farms. The farm aspect may have helped more than anything else to grab attention for this issue. Americans are notoriously sentimental about those farms on which only the merest handful would actually live, given the chance. To accuse the federal government of enmity to rural America—this is to say something pungent and powerful.

The estate tax dates back to 1916. Republicans and Democrats alike supported its short-term use during war-time. Ah, but leave it to Franklin D. Roosevelt and his collaborators to bump the top rate up to 77 percent, where it remained until the early 70's. Well, granted—55 percent isn't as bad as 77 percent. But

two points warrant consideration: first, as previously noted, the entrapment of middle class families in the toils of a tax designed for Rockefellers, Harrimans, and Fricks; and second, the raspberry directed at Edmund Burke and his intellectual kinsmen for arguing in behalf of perpetuating, rather than dispersing, inherited wealth. Congress's decision for the latter, rather than the former, is driven by spite. Never mind how hard you work. Forget prudence and forbearance! Bat away all those Burkean "flies of a summer": the kids, the grandkids. Let 'em make their own pile! Morally, intellectually, this may not be despicable advice. Whether it is the advice a government of free men and women is entitled to dispense is surely a different matter. The government's nose is stuck so far down in our pockets we sometimes forget there was ever a time when government protected, rather than thwarted, honest accumulation.

Can anything be done? That's the odd part. Yes. Congress moves in that direction. California Rep. Christopher Cox's bill to abolish the death tax has about 200 sponsors and virtually unanimous, as you might suppose, business support. An alternative is the ten-year phaseout proposal sponsored by two House Ways and Means Committee members, Republican Jennifer Dunn of Washington and Democrat John Tanner of Tennessee. Neither lawmaker could be called an acolyte of Newt Gingrich.

What's this? Prudence asserting itself in Washington? The "contract of eternal society" making the rounds for signature? Mr. Burke, Mr. Burke, for an old dead guy in ruffles, you are so . . . so . . . stylish.

—Bill Murchison

IMPEACHMENT AND KOSOVO are behind us, and now we can get back to the important issues of "Social Security, affordable health care, welfare reform, the environment, and education." President Clinton can get back to "running the country," presumably for "the sake of the children," so that "at the end of the day," we can "prepare for the 21st century."

Whew! Most Americans seem to have survived the "constitutional crisis" and the "trauma of impeachment" with, it would seem, nothing much damaged except our language.

So what comes next? That is almost too easy to guess. The item that Clinton seems most excited to tackle is education.

His solution to that "problem" is a marvel of simplicity: 100,000 new teachers.

In fact, Clinton seems obsessed with the number 100,000. He wants 100,000 new cops on the beat, and he wants to issue 100,000 vouchers for new housing, whatever that means.

Just think of that number. If Larry King really did interview 30,000 guests in 30 years, it would take him another 70 to reach 100,000 interviews. The equatorial circumference of the Earth is only 25,000 miles, so that is four new teachers for every mile of the equator. If the average height of the new teachers were five-foot-nine, their height stacked head to feet would be about 110 miles, or over 396 times as tall as the Sears Tower. As Jerry Lewis says on his annual telethon, "That's some kinda number!"—as if numbers, in and of themselves, have an intrinsic meaning.

In reality, however, what would be the effect on American education of 100,000 new teachers? Indeed, what is the stated purpose of such an addition to our force of public pedants?

The best place to begin is, of course, with some facts. Reliable current statistics regarding education are difficult to obtain because corrections to reported data continue long after the initial counts. A reasonable, conservative extrapolation from data in *The World Almanac* indicates that, in school year 1999-2000, there will be in our public elementary and secondary schools approximately 47.7 million students presided over by some 2.8 million teachers, for a national average student-teacher ratio of 17 to one. An additional 100,000 teachers would only lower that ratio to 16.4 to one, which might not sound like a bad thing to do, except for the heavy price to be paid by local districts because of more federal control over schools.

But now comes a twist in Clinton's numerology: He also wants to lower the student-teacher ratio to no more than 15 to one "in the early grades." Taking this to mean kindergarten to eighth grade, where there will be some 34.1 million students in 1999-2000, if the student-teacher ratio were to be a classroom *maximum* of 15 to one, then the overall ratio would certainly have to be a good bit *less* than that. But even at the impossible average of 15 to one, these 34.1 million students would require 2,273,000 teachers. This would be more than 78 percent of *all* teachers, both elementary and secondary. If the proposed 100,000 new

teachers were all assigned to the lower grades, this would leave only 527,000 teachers for the 13.6 million students in grades nine through 12. For them, the student-teacher ratio would soar to almost 26 to one, thus crippling the personal attention that might help lessen the alarming high-school dropout rates.

People in general, and politicians in particular, are overly impressed with numbers, and in education, most everyone seems to agree that more teachers and more money will solve perceived problems. But three examples seem to indicate otherwise.

First, do lower student-teacher ratios automatically increase educational achievement? It would be difficult to claim this on the basis of statistics. For example, that ratio in Texas in 1996 was 15.5 to one, much lower than the national average, but the graduation rate in Texas was only 58.4 percent (43rd in the nation) and SAT scores were below the national average. By contrast, the student-teacher ratio in Utah that same year was a high 24.4 to one, the graduation rate was 78.4 percent (12th highest nationally), and SAT scores were much higher than the national average.

Second, does teacher pay correlate with student achievement? Again, it is difficult to argue that it does. The aver-

age teacher's salary in California in 1996 was \$43,725. The state ranked 37th in its graduation rate and had SAT scores that were nothing to brag about. Meanwhile, the average teacher's salary in Utah was only 75 percent of his counterpart's in California.

Finally, can the federal government be expected to provide any leadership whatsoever in the field of education? The most devastating answer to this is presented by the District of Columbia, which, according to the Constitution, is under the control of Congress. In D.C., teacher salaries averaged \$46,350 in 1996 (sixth highest nationally), the student-teacher ratio was 14.9 to one (much lower than average) and the expenditure per pupil was the second highest in the nation. Yet SAT scores in D.C. were second from the bottom, and the graduation rate was only 53.2 percent, the lowest in the nation.

Along with the 100,000 teachers, Clinton's education proposal calls for building 5,000 schools. Quite aside from all of the figures offered above, if the 100,000 new teachers were assigned to those schools, each would have but 20 teachers, hardly enough for a country school in a small county.

It boggles the mind to consider the wild applause offered by the audience at

the State of the Union Address when nothing but numerological glossolalia was mentioned in regard to education. A much better proposal would be for the federal government to turn its attention to the D.C. public schools and make them a model of educational excellence that the rest of the nation could strive to imitate with local dollars and local management.

One question that hasn't been raised is how the nation could produce and certify 100,000 new teachers in short order. One suggestion would be to decrease, or better yet eliminate, the need for local compliance officials, who could teach but instead spend their valuable time filing reports with the Department of Education. And, of course, the elimination of the Department of Education itself would release a huge number of certified teachers.

With NATO's recent "victory," everyone should hope that President Clinton will not try to impose some variation on his favorite number on the people of Kosovo.

—Robert J. Wisner



Mary Pride, *The Big Book of Home Learning* (Crossway Books). Now in its fourth edition, *The Big Book of Home Learning* is the indispensable resource for parents considering homeschooling and for anyone intrigued by the rise of home education.

George Meredith, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (Penguin Books). This brilliant novel chronicles the tragic rise and fall of a young man whose doting father tries to educate him into perfection.

Sophocles, *Philoctetes*. A rare Greek tragedy without sex or violence, in which a young man learns moral responsibility.

Gerard B. Wegemer, *Thomas More: A Portrait of Courage* (Scepter Publishers). This readable biography concentrates on More's moral and spiritual heroism and explains how his "habitual attention to conscience" enabled him to be "merry to the end."

OBITER DICTA: Time is running out to register at the early-bird rate for the Tenth Annual Meeting of the John Randolph Club. This year, our doughty band of paleoconservatives and libertarians strikes at the belly of the beast, crossing the Potomac River into Georgetown to explain "Why Washington Doesn't Matter." With the possibility of a surprise guest showing up for dinner on Saturday night, this is one John Randolph Club meeting you won't want to miss. To register, please see the advertisement on the inside front cover. Also, please note that the last day to receive the special JRC rate at the Latham Hotel is September 8.

Our poetry this month flows from the hands of **Constance Rowell Mastores** of Oakland, California. Her poetry has appeared in the *Lyric, Press, Blue Unicorn, Boulevard*, and *Artweek*, among others.

The intriguing caricatures of **Darren Gygi** return to our pages this month. Mr. Gygi, who also provided the artwork for the July issue of *Chronicles*, has been illustrating magazines for over two years. A lifelong student of caricature, Mr. Gygi resides in Utah with his wife, Megan. More samples of his work can be found in his online portfolio, www.theispot.com/artist/gygi.



Grow Old Along With Me

by Thomas Fleming

“I grow old learning many things,” said Simonides, a poet well known for his wisdom and for his longevity: He lived to be almost 90. Although, as my old teacher Douglas Young pointed out, Simonides’ statement might be interpreted to mean “too much education makes one prematurely old,” the point is clear enough and as true today as it was 2,400 years ago when the Greek poet went from town to town, composing odes and epitaphs for his fellow aristocrats: A wise man never ceases to learn new things.

Simonides’ reputation for wisdom was so great that Plato took him on in the *Protagoras* and tried to discredit—unsuccessfully, in my opinion—the poet’s definition of virtue as a reflection of a good conscience and character. Aristotle, who did so much to restore character (as opposed to merely rational understanding) to the center of ethics, would also have approved of Simonides’ commitment to learning. In fact, he opened his *Metaphysics* with the statement that man is born with the desire to find things out. To give up learning, then, at any age, is to cease to be fully human.

What, after all, distinguishes the human race from other predatory mammals, if not his curiosity? All mammals, to be sure, go through a process of education, as they are taught to hunt or forage and obey the rules of the pack or pride. For tigers and wolves, the process lasts a few years (rodents have even a shorter time to find the wisdom that will enable them to survive), but the higher apes continue to learn up to perhaps the end of junior high school age, which beats the average American who attends public schools.

In the wild, many human beings seem to reach maturity (that is, the point at which they stop learning) by the age of 21,

and until recently the government recognized the fact by making 21 the age at which boys and girls were considered obedient enough to vote and sufficiently dull-witted to want to drink themselves unconscious in a public place.

Humankind is unusual in prolonging all the stages of development (except for *in utero* development: Our oversized heads require premature delivery), and the higher types of humanity—poets, aristocrats, warriors, and composers—are noted for preserving a certain juvenile openness to the end of their careers, if not of their lives. Mozart died young, but there is no reason that he would ever have grown up, any more than “Papa Haydn” or Sophocles or G.K. Chesterton really grew up.

Animal trainers and primatologists know that every species has its limits. You can’t teach an old dog new tricks, and a gorilla that has learned sign language in its youth will, upon reaching maturity, adamantly refuse to play along, even if he can get a treat every time he flashes the correct sign. In training dogs and horses, care must be taken not to destroy the animal’s spirit. Vachel Lindsay’s “broncho that would not be broken” died rather than allow itself to be turned into a machine, and the mad poet apostrophizes the colt in the glory of his freedom:

As you dodged your pursuers, looking askance
With Greek-footed figures, and Parthenon paces,
O broncho that would not be broken of dancing.

America is full of high-spirited boys who will join gangs or follow the Grateful Dead from town to town before they will permit their souls to be destroyed in a government school.

I can almost hear the latter-day Gradgrinds objecting: “Boys

must be disciplined and prepared for careers in the 21st century." It is true. Every society, whether of rats or Rotarians, has its rules and its system of discipline, and part of everyone's education must be the trial-by-ordeal in which we learn the penalties for robbing the neighbors or chewing with the mouth open, and a nation whose business is business must enforce the code of the Rotarian, willy-nilly, upon the children of Zenith and, more recently, of Yoknapatawpha.

It is no accident that American education first emulated the techniques of the factory and then passed them back again, suitably streamlined, to the efficiency experts. The inventor of "Taylorism" confessed that he had been inspired by the routinized assembly-line instruction he had observed in Massachusetts schools. Leftist and libertarian historians—Joel Spring (*The Sorting Machine*) and Michael Katz (*The Irony of Early School Reform*)—have traced the symbiosis of school and factory which, in more recent times, has spawned such mind-deforming programs as "School to Work" and the thousand-and-one proposals from national and local groups of illiterate businessmen who think they know how to reform education. If the CEO's of Fortune 500 companies wanted to do something about education, it has always seemed to me, they might begin with themselves.

But if every society needs its workers and team players, its sports fans and robots, it also needs a class of leaders, of warriors and dreamers who will fight for something grander than the GI Bill and sing the songs that make life seem, if only for the moment, worth living. We all know, even the CEO's, that the United States has failed to train our robots and worker-ants in the habits of diligence, punctuality, and thrift; and some of us are even aware that our math instruction is so poor that we have to import Asian students to fill the places in our engineering schools (something like half of our engineering graduates are foreign-born).

I would like to say I was alarmed by these developments, but I am not, because this country has already failed in a far more important—indeed, the primary—task of education, which is to form the mind and character of an intellectual, moral, and social aristocracy that is the only excuse for all the dirty business that a nation does. Other societies have fouled the water and slaughtered the innocent at the same time they were producing the younger Cato or Walter Scott or George Patton. Yes, America did once produce men who were both warriors and dreamers, men of action (like Robert E. Lee and Douglas MacArthur) who lived by a higher code than can be contained in a Dale Carnegie handbook or an inspirational lecture by Tom Peters. What the United States grinds out year after year, however, are post-human androids, the likes of Bill Gates and Wesley Clark and George W. Bush.

If Gaetano Mosca was right—that every nation's character is defined by its ruling elite—then U.S.A., Inc., must be set several notches below the Assyrians, who were, at least, colorful in their butcheries and distinctive in their art. Next time you visit Chicago, go to the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago and see what is left of Nineveh and Tyre. (The collection, by the way, owes much to the exertions of by far the greatest man ever to grow up in Rockford, J.H. Breasted, whose name is forgotten in his hometown, which, like most hometowns, has tried to eliminate its historical memory.)

As uncongenial as the worlds of Hammurabi and Senacherib are to an American, the freshness and vitality of their art (much

of it creatively borrowed from the Sumerians) is disconcerting to people dulled and blunted by the endless line of products pitched at weary K-Mart shoppers. The Assyrians were as nasty and violent as Madeleine Albright, but they were no hypocrites: They exulted in brutality and boasted of it in their monuments. It is not our victims' blood that should be gagging Americans but the pious lies that are used to cover them up. We swallow them, though, and for all their bitterness, we keep down the poisons that are killing us. Better to be an Assyrian.

I have taken my children to the Oriental Institute twice, once when they were being taught (not "schooled," if you please) at home and once when they had some private school education under their belts. On the first visit they were, despite their silliness and immaturity, still open to experience, but by the second they were exhibiting the signs of the bored, resentful products of a religious school doing its best to ape the public schools of 1962.

Their parochial high school, while it succeeded in teaching them to sit still and work out algebra problems (which we never could do at home), has also poured cold water over the glowing embers of their youthful curiosity. Their religion classes taught them the faith of Voltaire and Martin Luther King, Jr.; history and literature amounted to a series of documents in the progressive struggle against European Christian patriarchy; and their manners and dialect were reduced to the patois and gestures of delivery boys at the bottom end of Rockford's famous "Pizza Connection."

Back in the 1960's, the Yuppies used to say, "Your children belong to us." They were right, in a sense, but my kids don't belong to Grace Slick or Tom Hayden, but Mr. Hayden's children (if he had them) and mine both belong to McDonald's and Disney and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, whether they have ever eaten a cheeseburger or turned on the television.

Buffy's fans, by the way, were desolate this summer, when the network, in the wake of the Columbine shootings, decided to postpone the final episode, in which the fearless vampire-killers kill the principal, who has taken the form of a 20-foot snake demon. Demons are apparently still safe in public schools; it is only students and teachers who have to worry about getting shot.

My primary fear, however, is not for the dangers our children's bodies are exposed to in schools but for the sterilization of their minds—

Too much the baked and labeled dough
Divided by accepted platitudes,
Across the stacked partitions of the day . . .

—that Hart Crane observed two generations ago. Better to plunge them again into the chaos of a household where Simonides is no stranger, Simonides who is still learning more in his grave than their fellow students will ever learn in their school.

At this point in the argument, Dr. Gradgrind, Ed.D., plays his trump card: social necessity and the common good. "If you don't send your kids to school, they will never learn to get along with other people." In other words, the real purpose of school is to socialize the little barbarians.

There might be some truth in this. With no authority more objective than an adoring mother to pass judgments on their performance, the typical product of homeschooling may be an unbearably monster, even more spoiled and self-centered than

his public-school counterparts. The problem lies not so much with the actual fact of studying at home as with the character of homeschooling parents, who are just as ignorant, just as self-indulgent, and just as muddleheaded as anyone else born since 1940. They cannot discipline their children (they can't even train their dogs) because they refuse to discipline themselves.

Many homeschooling parents are aware of the problem and send their children to music classes and tutors or club together into a cooperative school (where they can spoil each other's children). But granting the worst case that my children's grandmother can make against homeschooling, we only need to point to the public schools of America, where teachers are held hostage by violent students, where drugs are sold and used openly, where bad manners and perversity are deliberately inculcated in the classrooms, and where "counselors"—the bane of modern life—try to drive out every vestige of decency and modesty the children might have brought from home.

Home schools do not fail because they do not teach their children more and better things than they could learn in public schools; they fail, ultimately, because there is no common culture to sustain them. It is all very well for a literary eccentric to bring up a fourth generation of literary eccentrics—that is all I ever aspired to; but most mothers do not want their babies to grow up to be cowboys or Indians or specialists in Greek lyric meter or translators of Pasternak. They want their sons to be doctors or lawyers or real-estate magnates, men who will settle down and raise a family in some town where they can put down roots for 20 years, at least until their kids are in college, when they can move to Arizona or Costa Rica.

Some parents also want their children to grow up to be real men and real women, not simply employees (or entrepreneurs) and taxpayers. This is the only purpose of education—to teach us what to do with the half of our lifetime we do not spend on sleeping and working—and such an education inevitably entails a common culture based on books. Each family could make up its own curriculum, of course, if it lived in the wilderness and had no historical memory to preserve. We have come along too late in the world for that. To make sense of our own lives, we have to know who our people are, or were, and learn to think as they thought, even if we someday come to reject their conclusions.

There are no secrets to what constitutes a "good education" for an American: It is the Greek and Latin classics (preferably in the original), the Renaissance literatures of France and Italy, the best books written in Britain as well as our own provincial contributions to English literature.

There is a revival, of sorts, of the classics, not in the Ph.D. programs of major universities but in alternative colleges such as St. Thomas More in Ft. Worth, Calvinist academies like Douglas Wilson's Logos School in Moscow, Idaho, and in some of the sunnier spots of the homeschool movement. At this point, these projects in classical renewal are so many straws in the wind, not enough, perhaps, to make a dozen bricks in Goshen. The Hebrews, we should remember, were bitter because an evil and repressive government that killed their children was denying them the straw they needed for making bricks. They had to find their own straw, and we have to find our own bits of learning to make the bricks and mortar of our selves. Our dream, ultimately, is their dream, that we and our children will someday be freed from bondage to worship God and save our inheritance.

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DICTATIONS

Learning, Larning, and Schooling

"All men who have turned out worth anything have had the chief hand in their own education."

—Sir Walter Scott

Educate, *educare*, Latin, from *educere* "to lead out." Education is thus, etymologically, a leading out of young minds from inherited prejudices and superstitions. That, or something like it, has been included in dozens of textbooks on education. Like most pop scholarship, it is wrong. *Educare* may or may not come from *educere* (though the formation has problems), but if it does mean "lead out," it is the sense described by the *Oxford English Dictionary*: "To bring up from childhood, so as to form habits, manners, mental and physical aptitudes."

In other words, education is neither the naturally unfolding of the chrysalis into the butterfly nor a liberation from parental moral attitudes: It is a careful indoctrination of wholesome mental and moral habits. So far from being a radical project for detaching children from tradition, it is the process by which the little savages are disciplined into decent specimens of humanity.

So much for Latin. The Greek word *paideia* is more revealing, since its primary meaning is nothing more than childrearing. The Greeks knew that children could not rear themselves and eventually came to use the word to mean something like "chastisement," which is how it is employed in the Greek version of the Old Testament. (Kenneth Grahame's Badger, who insisted he wanted to "Lauren"—not teach—the weasels was modeled on a philologist.)

Although Greeks hired tutors for their sons, schools as such were a fairly late invention, and no Greek (apart from Plato and a few other professional eccentrics) was mad enough to think that the education of children was anybody's business but the parents'. Aristotle did concede that it was logical to assume that it was a community's business to oversee the rearing of the next generation of citizens, but he knew better than to buck the trend of common opinion.

Today, we assume that education is the business of everyone but the child and his family, and when a few parents take the radical step of teaching their children at home, they set up desks stocked with textbooks and call it a Home School. The real lesson they should be teaching is that even parents can only do so much: Education is ultimately the lifelong duty of the learner.

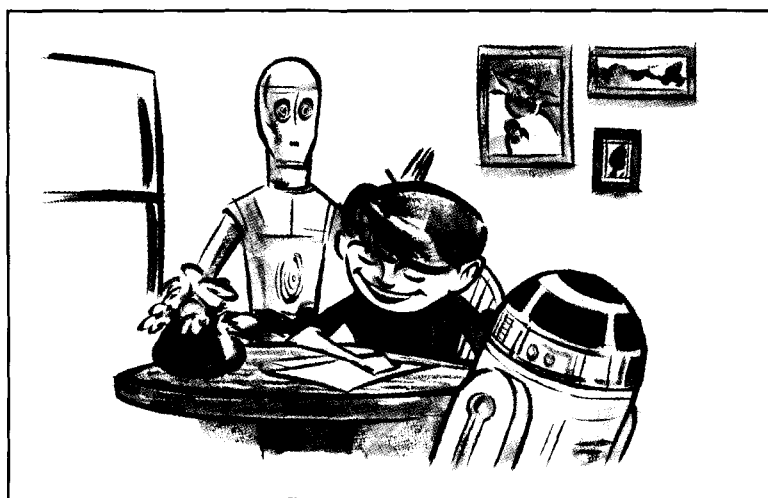
Perhaps we should agree to call home "home" and content ourselves with merely "teaching" our children without setting up a mirror image of the government factories of mediocrity.

—Humpty Dumpty

Star Trek or Star Wars?

Two Futures for American Education

by Mary Pride



When I was growing up, the nuclear-war nightmare and other end-of-the-world scenarios weighed heavily on filmmakers' minds. From radioactive giant lizards trashing Tokyo to the ironic *Planet of the Apes*, from *On the Beach* to *Dr. Strangelove*, the movies made it clear that our social order was on the edge of extinction.

The *Terminator* series was the last really popular hurrah of this genre. Unlike the earlier films, it strongly made the point that the future is *not* fixed. And unlike other dystopian movies, the series' real hero, John Connor, the young boy destined to organize humanity's overthrow of the machines, rejoiced in an unconventional education. Rejecting schooling as much as possible (we meet him playing hooky), the future savior learned survival skills at his mother's knee.

Somewhere along the way, the public got tired of all this doom and gloom. As the technology to make blockbuster science-fiction epics emerged, a more optimistic view of the future grew up with it. Today, the two most popular science-fiction franchises are the universes of *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*, which also contain the two most likely futures of education.

Star Trek is the future as modern liberals and socialists imagine it (not as it would be if they actually ran it, mind you). Money as a means of exchange has been abolished in the *Star Trek* future—a sure giveaway of its socialist core—although even

Spock cannot explain how this works. Businessmen are evil and to be mocked—Quark the Ferengi gets no respect from police-state privacy-invading Constable Odo, even when Quark has just saved the Deep Space Nine station. The *Star Trek* “Federation Council” is modeled on the United Nations, and in the *Star Trek* universe, a planet has to have a world government to have its membership application even considered by the Federation. Planetary sovereignty does not really exist—in fact, the plot of an entire *Star Trek* novel revolves around the necessity of saving a known terrorist from the wrath of his planetary authorities. The authorities want to execute the terrorist, but in the world of *Star Trek*, mass-murdering criminals get therapy, not punishment.

Consistent with socialist behavior, careerism comes first in the *Star Trek* universe. Children, spouses, and lovers are routinely abandoned by parents, spouses, and lovers in pursuit of Starfleet careers. A few examples: Kirk and Carol, the lover he impregnated; Janeway and her ever-absent Starfleet dad; Kirk and *his* ever-absent Starfleet dad; Riker and *his* ever-absent Starfleet dad. Even poor pathetic Lieutenant Riley, Kirk's attaché, is left behind by his love so she can pursue Starfleet career ambitions.

The *Star Wars* universe, on the other hand, is organized according to classical liberal and republican principles. The conflict between the Empire and the New Republic was modeled on the conflict between Great Britain and America during the War of Independence, according to *Star Wars* creator George Lucas. Planetary sovereignty is important in the New Republic; violating it could cause other planets to secede—a constant

Mary Pride is the publisher of Practical Homeschooling and editor of The Big Book of Home Learning, now in its fourth edition. She and her husband Bill have nine homeschooled children, all of whom are Star Trek and Star Wars fans.

worry for New Republic warriors and diplomats.

Nothing is more important in the *Star Wars* universe than family and fidelity. Some, though not all, bad guys can be redeemed (e.g., Darth Vader), but redemption includes paying for your evil deeds. Even scum care for their families and recognize debts of honor.

Sadly, in the hands of the less-competent writers of *Star Wars* novels, the distinctive republican features of the New Republic are blurry. (I am not speaking of Timothy Zahn, who should be drafted to write the screenplay for the next movie.) The new *Phantom Menace* movie also strikes some troubling notes—a democratically elected queen? With the wooden face of a marionette and painted like a mime? Artistically speaking, everyone agrees the new movie is loaded with eye candy, but the clever droids-in-a-box army and other such touches cannot make up for the fact that the citizens of Naboo—whose fate is the centerpiece of the movie—are alarmingly absent. How are we supposed to care about the sufferings of people who, as far as we can see, either do not exist or are invisible? With all the money they spent on the special effects, couldn't they have afforded a few extras? And what is with the wooden acting, the repetition of scenes from previous *Star Wars* movies (the good guy blowing up the bad guy's ship from inside, the predictable racing scene, the ending ceremony, *ad nauseam*), the cartoon-like Jar Jar Binks, the unlikely appearances of R2D2 and See-Threepio, the boring revisit of Tatooine, Anakin's "virgin birth," and other elements that had everyone in my family over age nine squirming in our seats?

As befits socialists, education in *Star Trek* consists of public schooling, a few private schools, and elitist academies where only a handful get the training they need to attain posts of importance in the Federation. The public schools of the *Star Trek* future have bells ringing to announce classes starting and ending, homework, grades, detention, gyms with bleachers, school libraries, and school bullies. Both Worf (the Klingon raised by humans) and Alexander (his son) are forced to endure years of taunting from their classmates. The Vulcans, usually so logical and intelligent, have public schools too, where in an earlier generation Spock also had to face endless cruelty from his classmates. Even out on the frontier, Keiko O'Brien bravely sets up a one-room school on Deep Space Nine rather than have her handful of students instructed by their parents or mentors. In line with much of today's public schooling, her classes follow no logical, systematic plan. Instead of giving children the "tools of learning"—basic instruction in reading, writing, math, science, and logic—her classes are full of factoids about randomly chosen races and planets, and the field trips are life-threatening.

The sole exception I have been able to find in dozens of *Star Trek* novels and junior novels is Beverly Crusher. Her pre-Starfleet Academy education was a mix of apprenticeship to her herbalist grandmother, tutoring from various adults, and self-study. That book (*Starfleet Academy #10: Loyalties*) was written in 1996, about three years after the homeschooling movement began garnering media attention, and so far is the only *Star Trek* book to admit that children can be educated anywhere other than in formal classrooms.

In contrast, schools below the academy and university level are practically unknown in the *Star Wars* universe. Scanning dozens of books and graphic novels, I found that, while rich kids on Corellia go to school, other children learn from parents, computer programs, droid tutors, mentors, and the world

around them. There are no discernible compulsory attendance or child-labor laws, so "street rats" are free to pick up spare credits legally if they can do the work. Hands-on, on-the-job training appears to be the norm. Nine-year-old Anakin Skywalker, who has never been to school, builds his own protocol droid and Podracer, and while this is precocious, it does not appear unusual to anybody. I am very curious about the "training" (not "schooling") that 14-year-old Amidala received that enabled her to rule a city and then successfully run for queen. I do not have to be curious about the training of other major *Star Wars* characters. Han Solo was self-taught, mostly via the computer on the ship of the Faginesque "trader" who raised him to be a thief. That self-education, plus his real-life experience, was enough to get him through the tough entrance exams for the Imperial Navy Academy. Princess Leia received her diplomatic training via apprenticeship to her foster father, Bail Organa. Wedge Antilles was homeschooled by his parents. Luke Skywalker was brought up on the farm. The huge variety of lesser characters mostly follow in their parents' footsteps, having learned their parents' skills.

For the kids of tomorrow to have the educational freedom of the street scum in a *Star Wars* movie, much change is still needed.

For those who leave home, apprenticeship is still the norm. Jedis take apprentices, not students. So do bounty hunters. Academies and universities (with the notable exception of the Jedi Academy established by Luke Skywalker, which offers informal seminars, no formal classes, and a lot of individual mentoring) are run by the Empire. In *Truce at Bakura*, we are told that promising students are funneled through the centralized universities so they can be indoctrinated in Empire propaganda. Graduates are then funneled into powerful positions in the bureaucracy and regional governments. From this we may infer that government-funded universities are not seen to be altogether a good thing in the *Star Wars* universe.

The military academy on Carida, which Han Solo briefly attended, is where promising students are turned into brain-washed storm troopers. This problem is eliminated when one of Luke's Jedi Academy students does what every right-thinking kid has imagined—he nukes the school (in this case, by blowing up the planet's sun). New Republic leaders feel bad about it, but hey, the kid was under the influence of the Dark Side at the time, and he *said* he was sorry, so what more can you ask?

Another of the Empire's delightful educational gambits, as seen in the book *Jedi Search*, involves the planet Omwat. The Empire selects promising preteen students and crams their brains with information at a staggering rate. They are repeatedly tested, and if a student fails or cracks up, his hometown is destroyed. It is not hard to see the analogy between this and the crushing pressure of the Japanese education system, where children were once taught their greatest honor would be to die for the emperor, and where even now families are shamed if a

child cracks up under the pressure or flunks the all-important pre-university exams.

Here in the real world, we seem to be moving in the direction of *Star Wars*-style educational freedom and out of the *Star Trek* educational straitjacket. About 1.75 million children are currently homeschooled. The movement has grown at a rate of at least 15 percent per year for over ten years now, and shows no sign of fading.

Years ago, people used to ask me, "What about socialization?" or "What about college?" Today, they are more likely to say, "I don't blame you for homeschooling; the public schools aren't safe." Movies like *187* and *Substitute Teacher* are unintentionally great recruiting devices for homeschooling, while the latest round of school shootings sadly underscores the fact that concerns about student and teacher safety are not Hollywood alarmism.

But dodging a bullet is not the main reason more and more families homeschool. We are searching for something *more* for our children and ourselves: A better education, tailored to our child's abilities. An education that honors God, instead of ignoring or insulting Him. Courses most schools no longer teach—Latin, Renaissance painting techniques, etiquette. Hands-on learning projects that draw the entire family together. The opportunity for work or volunteering that meets the child's interests, as opposed to politically correct "community service." The chance to get out in the real world, instead of sitting at a desk eight hours a day. Kids who respect and honor their parents.

Homeschoolers do not have to get all their learning at home or from parents. Educational software, adult mentors, the library, the piano teacher, Internet newsgroups, online academies, websites, 4-H, church groups, the YMCA, and more are all grist for our mill. The real world beckons.

We still live in a society where government rigorously controls childhood. Social workers prowl everywhere, and most

people still send their kids to school. Most children are not legally allowed to work. (One important exception: At any age you can work in your parent's business or on your parent's farm, which is one reason so many homeschooling families have started their own businesses.) In the past, an American street kid could get a legal job sweeping out a store in exchange for food and a place to sleep, but not today. Child-labor laws aside, no store owner would hire him for fear of legal liability.

For the kids of tomorrow to have the educational freedom of the street scum in a *Star Wars* movie, much change is still needed. The diploma-granting university system continues to have a virtual monopoly on entrance to good-paying jobs, and it is becoming more difficult to enter or graduate from such an institution without offering a pinch of incense to the caesar of political correctness. Apprenticeship, outside of a few carefully guarded union jobs, is not widely recognized as a valid educational method. Child-labor laws make it difficult for kids to learn a trade without formal schooling, and the plague of lawyers and bureaucrats make informal learning and work arrangements difficult.

But then, homeschooling itself was difficult only ten years ago and barely legal 15 years ago. With steady effort, we now have thousands of educational products to choose from, huge conferences to attend, and dozens of books to instruct us. Homeschool support groups are found from coast to coast, and homeschool magazines are on the newsstands. Research continues to show homeschooled children doing significantly better on standardized tests than their public-school peers, and in every issue of my magazine you will find success stories of homeschooled children winning competitions, creating impressive projects, or receiving some other form of recognition for outstanding work.

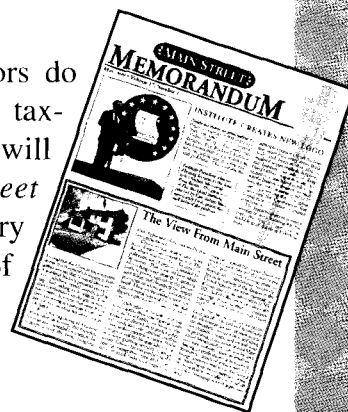
Fifteen years ago, who would have imagined all this? Fifteen years from now, how much further might we have gone? Punch it, Chewie!

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SEPTEMBER 1999/15

My Son, the Sociopath

The Education of a No-Man

by Andrei Navrozov



Darren Gygi

A few years ago, before my son was born, I spent a weekend in the Hamptons at the country house of a moderately hip American investment banker. There were about 20 of us to dinner that evening, with all the usual cosmopolitan strains amply represented. Boring and predictable as the whole business was, by about two o'clock in the morning wine and cognac were doing to the conversation what Harvard and Wall Street can never do on their own, and I was deep in a meaningful discussion with a German. By way of social definition, I should mention that the man was in his 40's, a member of the Knickerbocker in New York, and had the heiress to a reasonably important industrial fortune for a wife.

I tested the water by saying something mildly original about Hitler, whereupon your usual guest at a Hamptons dinner party would have moved at least one chair away. Nothing. The German even nodded assent. Then I said something inflammatory about the unification of the Fatherland being a Soviet ploy. Again, nothing. I was almost beginning to think the man had a brain. We spoke about life in London, and then he asked me if I was planning to have children. Just one, I said. If it is a boy, would I send him to school in England? I replied that, boy or girl, I had no intention of sending my child to school. He asked why.

Andrei Navrozov is Chronicles' European correspondent.

I began answering him. He took off his tie. I went on with my answer. He took off his jacket and put it over the back of his chair. He undid his cuff links and began rolling up his sleeves, and suddenly I looked up and saw that his face had become blue, as if engorged with venous blood. He was shaking with hatred. A few minutes later, he called for the hostess, who was German, and told her that he would pack his bags and leave the house at once as he found it impossible to spend the night under the same roof with the barbarian. I remember that it took the rest of the guests until dawn to placate him, while I was left alone at the dinner table with my glass of brandy and a half-guilty, half-sarcastic smile.

I can now admit that my presentation on the subject of homeschooling had not been so innocently improvised as I later made it out to be, when making my excuses to the host and hostess the following morning, but had in fact been honed, tempered, and made lethal like some barbarian tool of war in hundreds of similar conversations with equally excitable men and women over the course of a lifetime. It was the Germans, moreover, who had invariably managed to distinguish themselves by the uncontrollable force of their reactions, as though the mere verbal proclamation of a parent's right to incubate a sociopath in the privacy of the home were an actual crime without an historic parallel, far more barbaric or heinous than any of Hitler's. After all, those crimes were committed in the name of

order, of discipline, of greater social cohesion. In the name of the bright tomorrow of world socialism. In the name of our children's future.

The political crime of bringing up a child out of school—*vnye kollektiva*, “out of the collective,” was the standard Soviet locution used in my childhood—is still lacking a legal definition in some countries, such as Great Britain, and is only vaguely defined in others, such as the United States. In modern Germany, as in Russia and elsewhere, it is an offense punishable by fines and imprisonment, though it is quite certain that nowhere today, with such obvious exceptions as China or North Korea, are either the penalties or the manner of their enforcement as severe as the terrible repercussions my parents risked in Brezhnev's Soviet Union.

In keeping me out of the Soviet school system, my father was pursuing a dual aim. On the one hand, he was opposed to organized education for the sort of general reasons that everyone who regards himself as a dissenting individualist might give, from a loathing of the lowest common denominator to an abhorrence of communally defined intellectual or social goals; from a disdain for easy popularity (and, by extension, of public opinion) to a distaste for prefabricated life in all its forms; and so on down the list of good old nonconformist gripes, the most venial of which is that school is just a waste of time. On the other hand, there was the very real issue of security to consider, since a child who had absorbed certain ideas in the home of a political dissenter was sure to test them on his schoolmates and teachers, inviting a police investigation into their origins; equally, a child who brought a load of cultural rubbish home from school would have to undergo nightly brainwashing, with the best possible, and more than slightly improbable, result that he would develop into the perfect hypocrite, a cultural schizophrenic spouting acceptable banalities in public and thinking dangerous truths once the front door had clicked shut. But in a communal apartment such as one which he might consider himself to be extremely fortunate to inhabit for the rest of his life, that ordinarily magical click of the front door was no guarantee of privacy.

The longer I live in the West, the more clearly I see that the reasons which impelled my parents to risk prison by not sending me to school are equally valid here. Here, too, school is at best a waste of time and at worst a highly politicized mechanism for alienating and subverting the affections and loyalties of the very young—that is to say, of the intellectually and culturally defenseless. Now aged five, my son speaks three languages and can read, write, and do sums in two of them. He can ride a bicycle, shoot, swim and row, eat with a knife and fork, play chess, and say, “How do you do?” when meeting an adult. He does not watch television because we do not own one; he does not wear baseball caps, T-shirts, bandannas, sneakers, or tattoos; and he has never been to McDonald's. To my mind, this makes him a normal child—in the context of the culture to which we both belong due to the objective circumstances of race, family history, and tradition, to say nothing of the attendant subjective circumstances of our personal wishes, individual caprices, or private whims. To many others, including his American grandparents, this makes him a budding sociopath—which, in the context of a culture whose values his detractors do not find abhorrent, he probably is.

From there to the picture we have all seen on the front pages of Sunday newspapers is but a short paranoid leap. Incongru-

ously, and unhappily for the logic of the argument, the picture in question is usually a school yearbook photograph, though just about everything else about it seems like a pretty good fit. A “loner” is what the boy is usually called. He is brighter than the rest, but far more socially awkward and, very significant, no good at team sports—at any rate, not at football. He prefers individual achievement, swimming, shooting, running, perhaps a little tennis, or else he is altogether a reclusive bookworm, reading Nietzsche and Chesterton, sticking his nose into musty corners that even the school librarian avoids, flipping through yellowed back issues of *Life* for the obvious reason that there is no *Volkische Beobachter* in the library. He is taunted by classmates, reviled by teachers, has hardly a friend in the world. And then finally he snaps, scribbles a note to the effect that some kind of transvaluation of values is long overdue, and before long the people who manage public relations for the National Rifle Association have another hard day at the office.

The phrase “mad, bad, and dangerous to know” was coined to describe Lord Byron. Omitted from the media photofit is the vital fact that the lonely sociopath becomes a homicidal maniac—rather than, for instance, a poet or an Olympic swimmer—when and only when he is forcibly compelled to live within and obey the rules of the organized *kollektiv*, whether of the Soviet totalitarian or of the increasingly pseudodemocratic Western variety. In both societies, schizophrenic hypocrisy has always been on offer as the middle way. In each society, there have been people for whom that compromise was temperamentally unsuitable and unacceptable.

The loner who stays at home
rejects society in one of its most
virulent and concentrated forms before
society, in another of its most virulent
and concentrated forms, has had
the chance to reject him.

To them, at least so long as the strictures against home-schooling remain vague enough to allow parents to insulate their children from the collective culture which they mistrust and abhor, educating a child at home is the answer. The fabric of life in the West, when viewed outside such established and avowedly collectivist institutions as kindergartens and schools, government offices, or corporate environments, is still sufficiently porous and permeable to permit a private individual to withdraw into the recesses, to nestle and to burrow as he thinks best. It is probably still possible for a young couple in love to keep body and soul together, and educate a child in the meantime, on \$12,000 a year if they are willing to settle in a small industrial town in Piedmont, or a Catalan village with little tourist trade, or an unfashionable Greek island. Not a bad prospect, really, considering that just about anybody who is likely to regard his child's upbringing as a tragic dilemma, deserving of a

radical solution, is not in the socioeconomic position to think \$12,000 a year an unattainable dream.

As is clear from the personal anecdote with which I began, I think nothing of engaging a strange German in a potentially explosive discussion, and this brings me to another important element in the personality of the presumed sociopath who is the product of home education. All my life, I have been gregarious in the extreme, talking to taxi drivers about Kant and to train conductors about Reagan, chatting up schoolgirls in buses, merry widows in cafés, old ladies in tearooms. I have sold slim volumes of my verse to people who could not read a cartoon caption, and I have raised money for a magazine that shared many of the cultural attitudes of this one from people who thought George Bush was a conservative extremist. I have always had a hundred friends, which in the words of an old Russian proverb is better than having a hundred rubles, and I have never had a friend who would not have lent me a hundred dollars when I needed it.

Yes, I was raised away from other children my age, and this is the gift I have to show for all those years of deprivation. Socially, I have a style that belongs somewhere in the caricature world of aluminum-siding salesmen, of amiable connen of every stripe, of Riviera gigolos and old-style American newspaper reporters. And, since style is not only not personality, but often the opposite of personality, I use my social gift—my style, my charm, my gift of the gab—to tell people what they do *not* want to hear. Some would say that such Sisyphean labor more than makes up for whatever life I did not lose by attending school, and that it is obviously the height of futility to use all of one's energies to socialize with the very people one intends to antagonize. I disagree. I am convinced that the position of a writer is only tenable insofar as it carries with itself the privilege of telling people what they least want to hear, as well as the obligation of telling it in the most attractive way. A credible writer is like a beautiful woman missionary who lures her victims on the pretext of a night of passion and makes them sing psalms instead.

I suppose I will be happy if my son decides to follow me, my father, and my father's father, and becomes a writer. But what if, already scarred as I have been scarred, and already a sociopath by any definition save that of his own friends and family, he decides to become something else instead? An architect? A banker? My assumption is that in every field of human endeavor there is always some need for the services of someone who was not only never trained as a yes-man, but was actually trained as a no-man. And if his chosen field should happen to be too narrow to admit the likes of him, perhaps he ought to consider another, one that, in view of the peculiar kind of education he has received, would be more suitable.

Home education, after all, is a kind of early specialization. If you play the violin for eight hours a day from the age of three onward, you should not be surprised at age 20 when a bank tells you that they prefer to hire somebody else, perhaps the boy who ran the lemonade stand under the windows of your practice cubicle. Equally, if your education has consisted, even in part, of dreamy avoidance of the present and of sweet escapism into the past, you should not feel offended that a bum-kissing job in the English department of a major Ivy League university is not there waiting for you. Even if you critiqued *Grandison* at the dinner table and learned the variant readings of every Shakespeare play when you were just ten.

And if, when everything's said and done, my son should end up being a writer even more unemployable than myself—because writing, as a career and a means of subsistence, is destined to become as narrow, sterile, and bureaucratized as teaching or banking—then at least I can rest easy in the confidence that he will be more than moderately happy despite such misfortune. The loner who stays at home, after all, rejects society in one of its most virulent and concentrated forms before society, in another of its most virulent and concentrated forms, has had the chance to reject him. Like the hotel bellboy of old who always quit a fraction of a second before he was fired, he has his dignity, and that is the main thing.

That, and \$12,000 a year.

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Looking Back

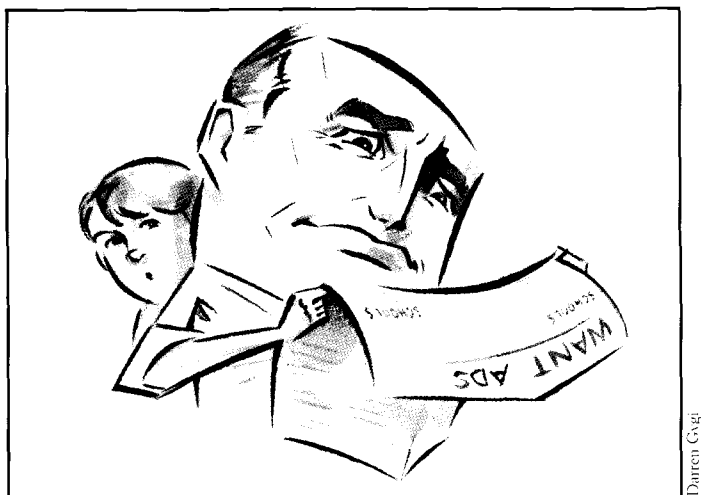
by Constance Rowell Mastores

Remember the fabulous sixties?
When people were enlightened?
I had a professor like that.
He taught Drama 103.
Until he took LSD.
Then it was poetry.
From the point of view of God.

Magistrate Mahoney

Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Started Homeschooling

by Scott P. Richert



In May 1995, when our first child was born, my wife and I were living in Northern Virginia. I had just completed the course work for my doctorate, and my wife was the exhibitions registrar at the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C. But just two weeks later, the day after our daughter was baptized, we packed all of our belongings into a Ryder truck and headed north.

Although I had no job lined up (nor even any real prospects), we never once doubted that we had made the right choice. Several months before, as the reality of Rebekah's impending birth had begun to sink in, we had realized a number of things. We wanted my wife to stay home with our children; we wanted to bring our children up in a more healthy environment than Washington, D.C., could offer; and we wanted them to have an advantage that we had both enjoyed—growing up close to family, especially to their grandparents. And so we headed back to our home state of Michigan.

After four years and two more children, I still have no doubt that we made the right decision—although there were some anxious moments during the seven months without a paycheck. Some clichés become clichés because they are true; and our children are truly the most important responsibility that God has given us.

That is why it surprises me to realize that we had never given much thought to our children's education. We had uprooted ourselves, cut our income back drastically, all "for the sake of the children"; but we had always assumed that the education of our children would be handled by "experts"—public (or possibly parochial) schoolteachers "who knew what they were doing." Amy had attended a Lutheran school through eighth grade, before going on to her local public high school in a suburb of Flint; I had attended public schools in my little village in

West Michigan. My elementary school was a true neighborhood school, just around the corner from my house, and my junior high and high school were just across the street. We had each received a solid education, both intellectual and moral, and we expected nothing less for our children. Then we moved to Rockford, Illinois.

Over the past two years, readers of *Chronicles* have probably become more familiar with the Rockford school desegregation case than they care to be. Now in its 11th year, the desegregation lawsuit has cost Rockford taxpayers almost a quarter of a billion dollars, raised our property taxes to the third highest in the nation, and destroyed public education in Rockford. Forget *Star Wars* and *The X-Files*—for sheer evil, Darth Vader and the Cigarette-Smoking Man have nothing on Rockford's own emperor, Federal Magistrate P. Michael Mahoney, and his master, Eugene Eubanks.

We realized rather quickly that we could never send our children to Rockford's public schools, and so began the hunt for a suitable Catholic school. Sometimes clichés are less than true, and that seems to be the case with the popular statement that private schools have about 20 years to go before they will be as bad as public schools are today. We had entered school 25 years ago, but the quality of education in Rockford's Catholic schools (and private schools in general) runs far behind that of the public schools at the time that we left them, only a dozen years ago. The problem can be traced partly to the desegregation suit—private schools expanded too rapidly as they tried to capture their share of the students who have left the public-school system—but the root of the problem is the failure of American education as a whole.

And so, reluctantly, we began to look into homeschooling. I say "reluctantly" not because we had any animus against homeschooling; on the contrary, while still in graduate school, I had written two courses for a college-level homeschooling curricu-

Scott P. Richert is the managing editor of *Chronicles*.

lum that Mary Kay Clark's Seton Home Study School was developing. But to Amy and me, homeschooling was something that we would do if necessary, something to tide us over until we could find a "real" school for our children.

Rockford, it turns out, is full of Catholic families who are just homeschooling until something better comes along, at least according to Michael Brunner, a long-time homeschooling parent. "How many Catholics have you met who are 'temporarily' homeschooling, for four, five, and then it's twelve years?" he asked me. Quite a lot, in fact; but I have talked to very few evangelical homeschoolers who feel the same way. Mr. Brunner ascribes the divergent attitudes to different approaches to public education. "For many years, there were no evangelical schools in the United States," he explains. "In many parts of the country, evangelicals were the backbone of the public-school system." When that system broke down, evangelicals had no place to turn, and so they led the homeschooling movement. Catholics, on the other hand, had their parochial schools—at least for a while. Now, while evangelicals still make up well over half of the homeschooling families here in Rockford, Catholics are playing catch-up. (Estimates of the total number of homeschooling families in the Rockford area vary widely. Illinois has among the most liberal homeschooling laws in the country, and since parents are not required to tell their local school district that they are homeschooling, most wisely do not. Rockford homeschoolers agree, however, that the homeschooling community here is among the largest in the country.)

The divergent attitudes toward homeschooling have another religious dimension. All of the evangelicals that I have interviewed have shared the conviction of Lisa Miller, the president of Christian Home Educators of Rockford (CHER), that their responsibility for their children's education is a religious obligation, one that should not be handed off to someone else unless absolutely necessary. While many Catholic homeschoolers eventually come to share that vision, they often make their initial decision to homeschool for non-religious reasons. Tom and Rita Sullivan, Latin Mass Catholics who have been homeschooling for eight years, decided to teach their children themselves after meeting some homeschoolers at a lecture by John Taylor Gatto. The Sullivans had gone to the lecture concerned about their oldest son, Kevin, who had begun kindergarten but was very unhappy attending school. Gatto's talk had been sponsored by a private day school in Rockford, but his message of separation of school and state attracted many homeschoolers from around Illinois and Wisconsin. When the Sullivans described Kevin's situation, the homeschoolers suggested that the problem might lie with the schools, not with Kevin—and so the Sullivans' homeschooling odyssey began.

Michael Brunner's decision to homeschool his children also arose primarily from necessity rather than religious conviction. After returning to his hometown of Stockton, Illinois, Michael and his wife enrolled their children in the same public schools that he had attended, and Mr. Brunner was elected to the school board along with two other candidates who were concerned about the quality of education. His candid criticisms of teachers who viewed their profession as a retirement plan rather than a vocation earned him few friends in the teachers' union, and some began speaking openly of "punishing" his children for his views. The situation came to a head when his son, David, then in eighth grade, broke his arm in two places during

gym class and was not allowed medical treatment for an hour. From then on, the Brunners have homeschooled their children and have been actively involved in homeschooling organizations in Rockford.

Mr. Brunner's passion for homeschooling comes across in his conversation. When I ask him what he considers the hardest aspect of homeschooling, his answer is surprising: "Thinking up enough challenges—making it as challenging as the schools were when I was young. But if you raise the standard, the children will meet it." The trouble with today's schools—both public and private—is that standards are constantly being lowered. While acknowledging some of the institutional pressures that have led to the "dumbing down" of modern education, Mr. Brunner ultimately blames the teachers, who "brought about the problem by not insisting on standards." One of the most positive aspects of homeschooling, he believes, is that most parents who decide to teach their children at home loved school themselves. Homeschooling parents do not view education as a form of "certification" or job training, but as an integral part of life, a process that never ends.

That is a distinctly minority view these days. As I look back on my own education, I realize how focused it has been on meeting certain "goals," with the implication that, once the goals are met, education can come to an end. It is refreshing to hear Lisa Miller describe homeschooling as a "lifestyle" and talk about the pleasure of "seeing the light bulb click on" as her children grasp a new concept—an experience, she notes, that many parents never have, since their children's education is confined within the walls of a school. And Rita Sullivan points out that homeschooling is an educational experience for parents as well as children: "Homeschooling changes your whole view—just living life is an education." In order to be able to educate your children, your own education needs to be renewed, refreshed, extended.

All of the homeschoolers that I have talked to were quick to point out that homeschooling also has many benefits that might be considered "non-educational"—most importantly, a sense of family closeness. Both Rita Sullivan and Lisa Miller attribute their strong relationships with their teenage sons to their homeschooling experience. While homeschooling may not be a panacea for teenage angst, the opportunities for rebellion are, at the very least, limited.

One of the most common objections to homeschooling is the issue of "socialization." When I mention this to Rita Sullivan, she simply laughs, saying, "That's why we keep them home." Kevin Johnson, the president of the Institute for Christian Apologetics and cohost of *Perspective Underground*, a weekly radio talk show, offers a similar observation: "In the wake of the recent school shootings, nobody asks me anymore why we homeschool." For homeschoolers, a more important concern seems to be that their children become what we might call "familialized"—that the bonds between siblings and between generations be strengthened. Lisa Miller likes the fact that homeschooling encourages the integration of age groups. "When I was growing up," she says, "you hung with your own." Her children, she believes, are much more comfortable with adults than she was at their age.

Increasingly in Rockford, the integration of age groups extends beyond the family, as homeschoolers come together to form cooperatives and even schools. In addition to the evangelical group CHER and the Catholic group RARCHE (Rockford Area Roman Catholic Home Educators), there are a num-

ber of smaller organizations tied to a particular church or neighborhood. And while Mr. Brunner's belief that "we are our children's first teachers" seems universally held, an increasing number of Catholic and evangelical homeschoolers agree that parents should not necessarily be their children's *only* teachers. Every Tuesday, many homeschoolers take their children to the Hallstrom School, an evangelical homeschool cooperative which had over 350 students enrolled in grades seven through twelve last year. At Hallstrom, students can take courses in subjects—for instance, foreign languages, math, and science—that their parents might find too daunting to teach, but the parents are also required to attend the courses. Michael Brunner finds the cooperative atmosphere exciting. Rockford, Mr. Brunner believes, "is the best place in the whole country to homeschool because of the support network. And homeschooling can only get better here in Rockford. Its reputation is increasing."

Because of the role that the desegregation case has played in encouraging my wife and me to consider homeschooling, I was surprised to find that most homeschoolers say that it had nothing to do with their decision. Lisa Miller estimates that over 70 percent of homeschooling families in Rockford are doing it primarily for religious reasons. But the number of those doing it for other reasons has increased in recent years, and Mary Hitchcock, a leading opponent of the desegregation suit, believes that broader trends in public education have convinced many parents to homeschool, while court orders and judicial taxation have accelerated those trends here in Rockford.

Everyone agrees, however, that the face of education in Rockford is changing, and that homeschooling will play an even more prominent role in the future. This fall, says newly elected school-board member Stephanie Caltagerone, the racial mix in the public-school kindergarten classes will reach approximately 50 percent white, 50 percent minority. In desegregation cases all around the country, this milestone has represented the point of no return. Unless Rockford proves to be the exception, enrollment in the public schools will drop dramatically over the next decade. With Rockford's private schools already bursting at the seams, more parents may well choose to teach their children at home. The thought worries some long-time homeschoolers, who fear that parents who have waited until this point to pull their children out of public schools will be less committed to homeschooling. Caltagerone agrees. "In the politically charged atmosphere surrounding homeschooling," she says, "it would only take a couple well-publicized cases of dual-income families pulling their kids out of the Rockford public schools and leaving them home all day to give the state a pretense for cracking down on homeschoolers."

Until the crackdown comes, however, my wife and I have made up our minds. We enrolled Rebekah in a Catholic co-op preschool last year, and this year her brother Jacob will attend as well. Both have caught on quickly to their numbers and letters, and enjoy reading (actually, reciting) their multitude of books. Becky has already surprised us by writing her own name before we even knew she could write, much less spell. And while no one so far has questioned our decision, we have memorized a line that Michael Brunner assures us will stifle any criticism here in Rockford: "My child is doing at least as well in homeschool as she would in public school."

Oh, and thank you, Magistrate Mahoney. Despite your best efforts to destroy our children's education, you may have actually done us a favor.

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Madame Preobrazhenskaya

by Constance Rowell Mastores

For too many years I've longed to bring back perfection: a triple pirouette *en pointe* performed in Madame's last class. "Finally!" she murmured, more to herself than to me.

She'd been nagging me all year. "*Souplesse!* Not so stiff! You're plié is too shallow! Head up!" Each time I failed in my technique, we went back to practicing half-pirouettes.

She was eighty-seven—I, nineteen. Three times a week I traveled from my place to hers at La Place de Clichy. She taught sitting up in a straight-backed chair. She was strict;

her French heavily Russian. In her youth she had danced at the Kirov—along with Pavlova. Now she was poor and gave lessons at Studio Walker . . . *At the top of the stairs, you turn left.*

"Stop talking!" she admonishes Zizi Jeanmaire. "Keep your charm for the stage. *Ici on travaille.*" Zizi with a "Yes, Madame," plants her feet in fifth position. "Constance! Up front!"

She performs with her hands—as if to remind me—the steps we've been learning from *Les Sylphides*. As the pianist turns to her page, I extend into open-fourth and prepare for the *tour de jetée* . . . then dance as if I were other. Passion and poise at one with technique. Attitude-turn in elated slow motion. *Spot back. Spot front. Back straight. Arms supple.*

I end with a flourish of three pirouettes and collapse in a pool of joy. "Finally," she murmurs, more to herself than to me. In Leningrad, the curtain falls.

CHRONICLES INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENT

What Are We Willing to Settle For?

by Joyce B. Haws

For nearly half a century, hundreds of school districts across the nation have battled exorbitantly expensive social engineering schemes forced upon them by federal courts under the guise of "desegregation remedial orders." These orders, which supersede local, state, and federal laws, are often devastating. Courts have stripped authority from local officials, told them how they must vote, and even ordered taxes to be levied. The expenses of carrying out these orders are often astronomical.

When settlements are suggested, weary school administrators and the public are often more than eager to negotiate. Settlements, however, are usually promoted by the court or plaintiffs to ensure continuation of court mandates long after a district is released from court control, and the district often fails to consider the consequences of a settlement.

In the **Indianapolis, Indiana**, desegregation case, Federal Judge S. Hugh Dillin ruled in February 1997 that about 5,500 black students from Indianapolis public schools must continue to be bused to districts in surrounding townships. While school officials had sought an end to the order, Judge Dillin said that it was his intent that the order be continuing and permanent.

Dillin's ruling was appealed in March 1998, and the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the transfers were never meant to continue indefinitely. The school district, however, under pressure to avoid continued litigation, agreed to a settlement, and Dillin closed the case.

Because of that settlement, busing in Indianapolis will continue for at least 18 more years. The settlement includes a pledge that no more than 85 percent of a particular school's staff will be of any one race. Townships may begin phasing out the transfer of students once their district's black population is more than 20 percent. If that percentage is not realized by the school year 2004-05, the phaseout can start anyway.

In **Cleveland, Ohio**, the federal court approved a six-year consent decree settlement in April 1994. Over two decades, student enrollment in the district, once about 150,000, had dwindled to about 70,000. Finally, a slate of candidates promoted by Cleveland's mayor won seats on the board by promising parents "less busing, more choice, and an early end to the 'desegregation' order." It was this school board that signed the consent decree.

The consent decree settlement will continue until July 2000; at that time, court oversight is supposed to end. The settlement was tied to a new educational plan for the district called "Vision 21" which, in effect, did away with the traditional neighborhood school concept and institutionalized a race-conscious assignment policy.

The district won release from the racial balancing component of the court order, and the consent decree was modified

accordingly. However, a February 2, 1999, *Cleveland Plain Dealer* article reported that 35,000 students continue to crisscross the city daily on 570 buses.

In the first week of June 1999, Leslie Myrick, director of student assignment in Cleveland, stated that the district continues to have a "goal" of 70 percent minority and 30 percent white enrollment in magnet schools. Myrick says "controlled choice" (a student assignment program used in a number of desegregation cases across the country, including Rockford's) is used when students first apply in an attempt to achieve that goal. After the initial enrollment period, if spaces are still available, they are filled by a lottery process regardless of race.

In apparent contradiction of the policy described by the director of student assignment, the new CEO, Barbara Byrd-Bennett, directed that letters be sent to parents encouraging them to place their children in schools near their homes. She called for a return to neighborhood schools to help build a sense of family and community. How this will work with magnet schools, which are designed to lure students away from their neighborhoods, remains to be seen.

Residents of Missouri have learned the price of "ending" the **St. Louis** "desegregation" case. The settlement does not actually put a stop to busing; it simply changes the financing of it—for at least 16 more years.

Since voters were told that a return to neighborhood schools depended on the passage of a new sales tax designed to raise \$21 million, the tax passed. The state will continue to provide about \$45 million of the \$76 million it now pays annually under court order.

The settlement cuts the city into four pieces; new transfer students living in each area must attend particular county districts, lessening the longest rides from about 90 minutes to 70 minutes one way. County districts will accept new city students for the next three years and keep any current transfer students until they graduate. After three years, the county districts can choose whether to continue enrolling city students, for whom state funding will be available for the next decade. Most will probably continue to accept city students in order to receive the state funds. The city's magnet schools will be expanded.

"Desegregation" orders often involve not only blacks but other ethnic groups. On February 16, 1996, the *San Francisco Examiner* described an "alliance" between the NAACP and the **San Francisco** school district to achieve diversity quotas. Under a 1983 consent decree settlement, San Francisco's students are divided into nine ethnic and racial categories: American Indian, black, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Spanish-surnamed, other white, and other non-white. No group may exceed more than 45 percent of any school, and at least four groups must be represented at every school. Since 1983, the state has poured \$300 million into the scheme and currently spends \$37 million a year on it. Judge William Orrick continues to preside over the consent decree, which is supposed to

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end in 2002.

In 1994, Patrick Wong was denied a place at top-ranked Lowell High School because Chinese-American children must score higher on admissions tests than those of other ethnic groups. Brian Ho and Hilary Chen were turned away from their neighborhood elementary schools because those schools had reached their quota of Chinese-Americans. The families of these children filed a class-action suit seeking to overturn San Francisco's "desegregation" plan.

The case, had it gone to trial, might well have ended the unconstitutional violation of the 14th Amendment nationally. Unfortunately, a settlement was reached in the case, allowing San Francisco to continue forced busing and banning the use of race only as a *primary* factor in school assignment. The school district now is planning socioeconomic balancing, arguing that separate neighborhood schools for rich and poor are inherently unequal.

Officials in the **Milwaukee, Wisconsin**, school district filed a suit in 1982 against 24 suburban districts, claiming that they had contributed to racial isolation in the city's schools. A settlement was reached to bus 5,700 minority students from the city to suburban schools and about 700 white suburban students to both regular and magnet schools in the city. The settlement also limits the percentage of African-American teachers in most schools.

The mayor of Milwaukee, John O. Norquist, however, has recently called for an end to the use of racial quotas in all aspects of education, and Wisconsin Gov. Tommy Thompson's proposed state budget calls for scaling back financial incentives for school districts taking part in a city-suburban "desegregation" plan. Other legislation is being considered to end racial balancing.

Little Rock, Arkansas, along with North Little Rock and Pulaski County schools, operates under a 1989 "desegregation settlement." Little Rock school officials say that the settlement (which mandates that Little Rock achieve racial balance, reduce the achievement gap between whites and minorities, and answer to a federally appointed "desegregation" monitoring office) is a heavy burden that has kept them from turning their attention to other problems.

Many "settlements" are little more than pledges or verbal promises, never finalized into binding consent decrees. Nevertheless, they are considered binding by social engineers.

When court supervision in **Omaha, Nebraska**, ended in 1984, the district "pledged" to maintain an integrated school system. Racial assignment has continued in Omaha. **Ferndale, Michigan**, was released from court control in 1995. At that time, Superintendent Marcie Martin swore an oath before U.S. District Judge Horace Gilmore to uphold the schools' carefully orchestrated racial mix.

Some social engineers have launched last-ditch efforts for settlements to continue racial balancing for as long as possible and to avoid a possible ruling that would set a precedent for undoing court-ordered racial control nationwide.

In **Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina**, an historic trial began April 19 before Federal District Judge Robert Potter. Some parents in Charlotte brought suit last year, arguing that the district unlawfully discriminated against students on the basis of race to achieve race-balance goals. Ultimately, the suit was expanded to include a challenge to the district's entire school desegregation plan, which involves magnet schools, at-

tendance zones drawn on the basis of race, and mandatory busing.

The superintendent then proposed a controlled choice plan as a settlement in the case, hoping to continue racial balancing for several more years. The plan would have phased out the use of race when assigning children to schools, but it would not guarantee every child a place in the school closest to his home. Racial-balance requirements for schools would have ended after three years.

The trial went forward, however. While it ended in June, Judge Potter says he will need several months to review the testimony before ruling.

In **Rockford, Illinois**, plaintiff attorney Bob Howard appears determined to ensure that racial control of student assignment, through controlled choice and the use of magnet schools, will continue for many years. Local politicians and businessmen are pressuring the school board to settle "to achieve an early end to the case." But releasing the district while maintaining racial control is hardly an end, let alone an early end.

In November 1998, the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals ordered the parties to discuss a possible settlement. Bob Howard demanded that the court order remain in effect over two more decades. A minimum of \$148 million would be required for additional construction.

Howard demanded that the school board withdraw all pending appeals, that present "desegregation" orders be accepted, and that a petition to intervene in the lawsuit by three board members who have challenged the federal court's authority to order them to change their votes against judicial taxation be dropped. Not surprisingly, discussions of a settlement stopped.

On March 19, 1999, the Seventh Circuit closed the door to further appeals of funding orders but indicated that an end to the case was approaching:

The board told us at argument that it thinks full compliance with the decree is achievable by 2002, and when full compliance is achieved, the decree must be dissolved. The next logical step, therefore, is for the board to propose to the magistrate judge, after consultation with the plaintiffs and the master, a modification of the decree that will include an appropriate termination date (perhaps a series of different dates for different programs) contingent on the achievement of specific targets demonstrating a reasonable approximation to full compliance by then.

The district court, however, has attempted to sidestep that "next logical step," ordering the district to pay three facilitators to help the parties "promptly identify and embrace a middle ground that will end this litigation."

There is no middle ground involving racial control of this nation's students.

It is enough of a blot on our nation's history that courts have issued orders requiring racial and ethnic quotas, calling such orders "desegregation" and "remedial." To settle for anything that would continue such racial control is irrational and immoral.

We should settle for nothing less than a complete end of judicial tyranny and its resulting devastation of our school districts, disenfranchisement of our people, and racial and ethnic control of our children.

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We open this, the final *Signs of the Times* to be devoted entirely to Clinton's war in Kosovo, with an eloquent summary of the war by Canada's answer to Pat Buchanan, David Orchard. In an op-ed in the *National Post* (June 23), the prominent Tory declared the idea that NATO attacked Yugoslavia to solve a humanitarian crisis about as credible as Germany's claim in 1939 that it was invading Poland to prevent "Polish atrocities." In the meantime,

In an all out effort to convince public opinion that Yugoslavia deserved the onslaught, Western politicians and media are churning out endless accusations of Serb atrocities, while the proven and infinitely greater atrocities of NATO—launching an aggressive war, using internationally outlawed cluster bombs and firing depleted uranium ammunition into Yugoslavia—are buried.

But why did NATO attack Yugoslavia, and why are the Serbs ("Canada's staunch allies in both World Wars") being demonized? Orchard offers his answer:

During the war, Bill Clinton elaborated: "If we're going to have a strong economic relationship that includes our ability to sell around the world Europe has got to be the key; that's what this Kosovo thing is all about. . . . It's globalism versus tribalism." "Tribalism" was the word used by 19th century free trade liberals to describe nationalism. And this war was all about threatening any nation which might have ideas of independence. . . . In a March 28 *New York Times* article, Thomas Friedman wrote: "For globalization to work, America can't be afraid to act like the

almighty superpower that it is . . . The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist—McDonald's cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the designer of the F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley's technologies is called the United States Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps."

Orchard, a leading opponent of NAFTA north of the border, concludes that globalization undermines both democracy and national sovereignty, the only guarantors of human rights: "Unfortunately for Messrs. Clinton, Chretien et al; that message was not lost on millions around the world watching NATO bombs pulverize Yugoslavia."

Among the few satisfied with the outcome in Kosovo are the drug lords of the Kosovo Liberation Army, who may look forward to managing the global market in dope from their *Serbenfrei* fiefdom. Not so, according to the Clinton administration. As Reuters reported on June 23 ("U.S. has seen no evidence of KLA drug trafficking"), State Department spokesman James Rubin declared that "the U.S. government has never identified credible evidence of these drugrunning charges."

"We've seen reports in newspapers and elsewhere," Rubin said. But although American intelligence agencies have looked into the issue, "we have never developed credible evidence of our own," he said.

Pity they don't read *Chronicles* inside the Beltway. As for the future, far from disarming the terrorist group, Rubin envisaged its metamorphosis into

"a national guard along the lines of the U.S. National Guard. That's an aspiration. And if that aspiration is achieved, then obviously they

would have weapons."

Eat your heart out, Escobal!

By the time the KLA is converted into a "national guard," there will be no Serbs left in Kosovo. Their ethnic cleansing was forecast by "Mr. Massacre," William Walker, even before the war (*Globe and Mail*, February 17) and by Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon, who declared in the first week of June that Kosovo will not be a pleasant place for the Serbs under NATO and that nobody would try to stop them if they wanted to "return to Serbia." With the KLA murdering the remaining Serbian civilians, Radio Free Europe (June 16) quoted U.S. Army Gen. John Craddock as stating that disarming the KLA is up to the "discretion" of the respective peacekeeping troops and that "our soldiers are not instructed to routinely disarm the KLA." German army spokesman Lt. Col. Dietmar Jeserich was quoted in the same report as stating: "The KLA is walking the streets with its weapons, but the authority lies with KFOR." NATO's policy of allowing the KLA to terrorize defenseless Serbian civilians gave the lie to Gen. Sir Michael Jackson's appeal for Serbs to stay.

Among the many things that went unreported in the American press were the reactions of those who actually pressed the triggers in NATO's war. In Europe, however, the awful facts are coming out. Take, for instance, the sensational confessions of a Spanish air force officer, reported in the Spanish weekly *Articulo 20* (June 14):

Captain Adolfo Luis Martin de la Hoz, who returned to Spain at the end of May after having participated in the bombings since the beginning, is . . . categorical: "The majority, even if not all, of my colleagues are against the war in general, and against this war of barbarity in particular." . . . The suspicions that NATO's repeated bombings of civilian victims and non-military targets are not the result of "errors"

are confirmed by Captain Martin de la Hoz: "Several times our Colonel protested to NATO chiefs that they selected targets which are NOT military targets. They threw him out, with curses, threatening that the North Americans would lodge a complaint with the Spanish Army, once through Brussels and then to the Defence Minister. I want to tell it to the whole world: once there was a coded order from the Americans that we should drop anti-personnel bombs over the localities of Prishtina and Nish. The colonel refused it altogether and, a couple of days later, the transfer order came, removing him from our unit."

Capt. Martin de la Hoz believes that there was no excuse for the wrong selection of targets:

"There is no journalist who has any slightest idea what is happening in Yugoslavia. They are destroying the country, bombing it with novel weapons, toxic nervous gases, surface mines dropped with parachute, bombs containing uranium, black napalm, sterilization chemicals, sprayings to poison the crops and weapons of which even we still do not know anything. The North Americans are committing there one of the biggest barbarities that can be committed against humanity. . . . [J]udging by what we talked about with the British and German officers, it was designed in order to divide the Europeans and keep us subjected for many decades."

Capt. Martin de la Hoz concludes:

"Be sure that what I say is not to exculpate myself and to intone 'mea culpa' for having participated in it, because I will never be able to forget that what was being committed there was one the biggest savageries of history."

Don't hold your breath waiting for the

perpetrators of those savageries to be prosecuted. While the mainstream media in America take both the authority and the supposed impartiality of the war crimes tribunal for the former Yugoslavia for granted, healthy skepticism is occasionally allowed into the establishment press in Europe. Writing in the *Times* of London (June 18), John Laughland rightly predicted that the allegations of war crimes—"eagerly funnelled out of Kosovo by the thousands of journalists in the province"—would provoke a demand for retribution, but he also warned that the Hague is "a rogue court with rigged rules," established to override the key principle of the international order—the sovereignty of states within their borders—in the name of protecting people from despots. Laughland calls this a "seductive argument" that may allow the "international community" to wield unfettered power instead:

The International Criminal Tribunal shows little sign of caring that Nato has itself broken nearly every rule of war, or that the peace deal concluded with Belgrade is null and void in international law, since Yugoslavia's signature was obtained by force. Instead, it displays considerable contempt for the very thing which distinguishes the rule of law from retributive justice, namely due process.

Laughland points out that the old principle that a defendant may not be tried twice for the same crime "is calmly brushed aside by Article 25 of the tribunal's statute, which gives the Prosecutor the right to appeal against an acquittal and obtain a conviction instead." Three such appeals have already been launched. Another deeply rooted principle, that no party may be the judge in its own cause, does not apply to the tribunal:

Although it is a key requirement for due process that a defendant be tried by a body "established by law", the Security Council is not a law-making body. Faced with the allegation that it had no legitimacy, the tribunal did not refer the matter to another body, such as the International Court of Justice, but in-

stead decided to deal with the charge itself. Not surprisingly, it found in its own favour.

Other anomalies are legion: The tribunal does not accord the right to bail or to a speedy trial; it does not have a definition of the burden of proof required for a conviction; it does not have juries; there is no independent appeals body; rules against hearsay, enshrined in common law, are not observed; and the prosecutor's office prefers the tribunal's own "war crimes investigators" to witnesses, flouting the rule that a defendant must be able to confront his accusers and to prepare a cross-examination of them.

The tribunal gives itself powers as it goes along. Louise Arbour, the recently departed Chief Prosecutor, has said: "The law, to me, should be creative and used to make things right," and the tribunal dips into a potpourri of different legal systems from around the world. . . . As if this were not enough, the tribunal is not funded by disinterested parties, but by those who waged or supported the attacks on Yugoslavia. These include the leading Nato governments (especially the United States) and various non-governmental organisations like George Soros's Open Society Institute, whose head of office in Kosovo is a militant supporter of the Kosovo Liberation Army.

Might, it seems, is always right, and Laughland reminds us that, on May 17, the NATO spokesman, the inimitable "Jamie" Shea, explicitly rejected any possibility that NATO leaders could ever be indicted by the tribunal. As Laughland concludes: "This is not victors' justice—it is no justice at all."

**When in Rockford,
Eat at
Lee's Chinese
Restaurant**

3443 N. Main Street

M.E. Bradford and the Barbarism of Reflection

by Donald W. Livingston

"The hours of a wise man are lengthened by his ideas."

—Joseph Addison

**A Defender of Southern Conservatism:
M.E. Bradford and His Achievements**

Edited by Clyde Wilson

*Columbia: University of Missouri Press;
208 pp., \$29.95*

This is the first critical study of M.E. Bradford, whose untimely death in 1993 silenced the most eloquent voice ever raised on behalf of the permanent things as they are revealed in the Southern tradition. It would be a mistake, however, to think of Bradford as an academic specialist in things Southern or as a Southern ideologue crediting the South with impossible virtues at the expense of its real ones. In fact, behind Bradford's scholarship on the South was the question, "What does it mean to be an American?" This question had to be raised because the American tradition which we have inherited contains a broken memory. Rooted in state and local sovereignty, the original federated republic was designed to protect corporate liberty: ways of life that bind the generations, not the radical autonomy of individuals. Ultimately, this federation was subverted by the concentration of power necessary to coerce the Southern states back into the Union and to destroy their social and political order. On the ruins of the old

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Darren Cvigi

republic, a new public rhetoric was developed—by Lincoln especially—legitimizing a unitary state and the universalist and egalitarian ideology, in the French style, that lay behind it. Intent upon disguising this revolutionary character, purveyors of the new rhetoric constructed an imaginary history of the Founding, and a false American identity.

Much of Bradford's work is an attempt to rescue an authentic historical understanding of the American Founding. His research revealed that the Southern tradition, far from undermining that event, constituted the most coherent application of its underlying principles. The Southern tradition appears as eccentric and troublesome only by comparison with the newer, Jacobin-inspired Americanism.

Yet Bradford's work is never narrowly historical: It is more like a running cri-

tique of the moral and political rationalism, derived from the Enlightenment, which has dominated American public speech since Lincoln's day. Enlightenment ideology, whether of the liberal or Marxist variety, requires us to disown (in the name of "rationality") our historical, ethnic, and religious identities, tainted as they are with particularity and contingency, in favor of a universalist civilization of tradition-free, autonomous individuals. Brilliantly, Bradford exposed the gnostic character of this aberrancy from the Western tradition and showed that totalitarianism lies in wait at the end of this path for all who consistently pursue it.

Bradford's career spanned the period of the Cold War, when the antagonism between Marxism and liberalism masked the fundamental identity of the goals pursued by each: Both required the destruction of traditional society in favor of a universal civilization grounded in the autonomous self. The liberal ideal of limited government for the sake of individual freedom and the Marxist fantasy of a classless society in which the state has withered away pursue the same end: the autonomous individual free from the restraints imposed by supposedly irrational contingencies and particularities. Although the American liberal regime has operated more gradually than its Marxist rivals, both succeed in purging religion, substantial moral communities, and tradition from public life. Because liberalism is more successful economically than Marxism, the process of destruction has been less painful in America and the other Western democracies, yet this difference in means should not be allowed

to mask the identity of ends.

Bradford's critique of Enlightenment liberalism was framed in the heyday of John Rawls' rationalist liberalism and of Harry Jaffa's crude imposition of fundamentalist rationalism on the American Founding. In that intellectual climate, Bradford's critique seemed scandalous. But in the last decade of his life, critics as diverse as Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Sandel, and John Gray offered their own devastating criticisms of the Enlightenment conception of reason—which, finally, has been as decisively refuted as any philosophical doctrine could be. And although fundamentalist American liberalism hangs on ritualistically among the courtiers of the Beltway, it is no longer credible to a rising generation of younger scholars. In the years to come, it is Bradford's work, not that of Rawls and Jaffa, that will be important.

The same may be said of Bradford's critique of Lincoln as a gnostic figure of the Enlightenment who, by his consolidation of power, derailed the Founders' federal commonwealth and set in motion a unitary state dedicated to an open-ended and antinomic egalitarianism. In his critique of the Lincoln myth, Bradford hit a raw nerve. Nothing less was at stake than the subversion of an Enlightenment American identity. Yet contemporary writers such as Jeffrey Hummel, James McPherson, and Garry Wills have come to the same conclusion, the difference being that McPherson and Wills celebrate the destruction of the federalism of the Founders, while Bradford laments it.

Since all the contributors to this volume knew Bradford personally, the essays, with their reminiscences and telling anecdotes, amount to a portrait of the man as well as an evaluation of his work, which ranged across American and British political history, philosophy, religion, rhetoric, classical studies, and literary criticism. Worth the price of the book is a complete bibliography of Bradford's writings, compiled by Alan Cornett, and another listing selected works about him.

Clyde Wilson and Thomas Fleming discuss the importance of the Greek and Roman classics in shaping both the Southern tradition and Bradford's own work and character; Thomas Landess, a fellow student with Bradford during his graduate career at Vanderbilt, describes his studies under Donald Davidson (the

only Agrarian to remain at Vanderbilt) and other teachers. Bradford was not a self-made man: His scholarly discipline and critical gifts were earned by rigorous apprenticeship, as Bradford himself acknowledged.

Mark Winchell and Benjamin Alexander examine Bradford's career as a literary critic. The Enlightenment conception of rationality and its inverted mirror image, postmodernism, have been as destructive to literary criticism as they have been to politics and morals: The result is the alienation of the typical modern writer from traditional society. But the response to modern life need not be alienation; rather, as T.S. Eliot and the Agrarians showed, recollection and conservation are always alternatives. Literature is an act of civic piety, though only by seeking to be art—not propaganda or ideology. The literary theory that supports this conception of literature was worked out by the Agrarians and appropriated by Bradford as he sought an understanding of the basic documents of the American Founding, as well as of imaginative literature. Modern Enlightenment critics cannot comprehend a literature rooted in Memory, considered by the Greeks the mother of the Muses. Hence, the Declaration of Independence is read today as a Jacobin tract, and Faulkner and Frost as writers alienated from their regional cultures. But Bradford shows that, although Faulkner and Frost could be critical of the South and of New England respectively, they acknowledged the cultural authority of their native grounds and were at home in them.

James McClellan and Marshall DeRosa discuss what, to my mind, is Bradford's most enduring contribution: a humane and adult understanding of America's founding documents. For over a century, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution have been transmuted by the philosophical alchemy of Enlightenment liberalism into instruments for satisfying its perceived needs. The Agrarians taught Bradford that, while a literary work has its own structure as a work of art, it must also be recognized as human speech framed in an historical context. Bradford gave a human face to the Framers at the Philadelphia Convention by writing a biography of each, and to the Constitution by reminding us that its authority springs solely from having been ratified by the political societies of sovereign states. The image of original intent must be taken

not primarily from the Philadelphia Convention, nor from the propaganda of the *Federalist*, but from the speeches of the state ratification conventions.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese, in an otherwise sympathetic account, find two blind spots in Bradford's historical vision. The first (according to the Genoveses) is that, in stressing the continuity of the Southern tradition with Roman republican virtue, Bradford ignored the teaching of Cicero, Tacitus, and Polybius that such virtues require for their operation a unitary experience which, in a universal empire (whether Roman or American), is nearly impossible. Second (the Genoveses believe), he—and the Agrarians—pushed the legacy of slavery and the burdens it imposed on whites and blacks to the margin of memory, while leaving the ghosts to subvert their brightest hopes for the future. While there is some truth in this criticism, it would be a mistake to think that the decay of the Southern tradition was caused by the failure to establish a better relationship between the races. The first assault on the Southern way of life was the Northern military invasion, motivated not by a desire to emancipate the slaves but to consolidate a commercial empire; economic, not humane, motives also drove Reconstruction and produced the economic discriminations imposed on the South well into the 20th century. And, of course, among the greatest blows to the Southern tradition were the Supreme Court's general and perverse subversion of federalism and its unconstitutional action of abolishing prayer in public schools. One cannot maintain a traditional society of any kind absent the local sovereignty required to do so. After full allowance has been made for racial injustice, it must also be said that race has been manipulated as an instrument for centralizing power—power that would be, and has been, used for quite different purposes.

The forces that sought to destroy the Southern tradition in the 19th century and which have all but completed that work today are centralization and consolidation: From the French Revolution to the present, they have produced several world wars and a long line of totalitarian revolutions. Whether through liberal or Marxist regimes, they have operated according to the same pattern, sucking life from traditional social authority and attempting to breathe it into artificial constructs at the center. A more telling criti-

cism of Bradford might be that, in an age of Enlightenment ideology and corporate capitalism, neither the Southern tradition nor any other traditional society is capable of maintaining itself. If that is so, then what are we to make of Bradford's witness?

This question is considered by Mark Malvasi, who argues that Bradford did not view modernity as a seamless metaphysical substance from which there is no escape. His defense of the Southern tradition was merely part of his philosophical defense of tradition as a condition of humanity, virtue, and rationality. Opposed to this are a vast array of Enlightenment ideologies, each advocating its own form of the autonomous self and each in implacable opposition to the rest. There is no danger of man losing his tradition finally, because man in that case would cease being human. Tradition is always being renewed. In the end, therefore, Bradford's defense of tradition

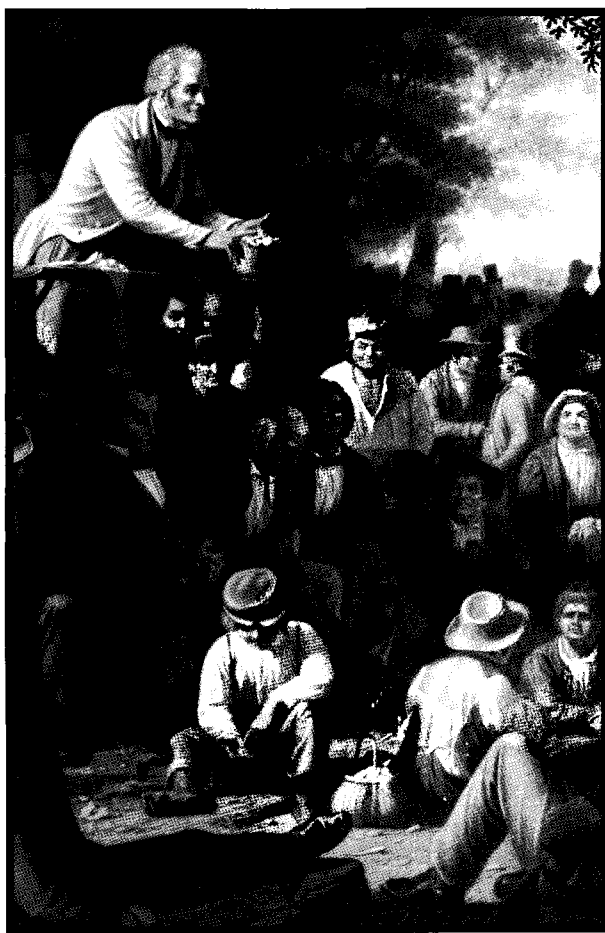
opens out into a justification of the ways of God to man. People given to Enlightenment superstition can become alienated from their cultural inheritance and lose confidence in it. To recover and restore a valuable way of life requires taking seriously the question, "Who am I?" Bradford's answer was that he was a Southerner, an American, a man of the West, and a human being, all together, and that he could not be any one of them without being the others as well.

Bradford disowned the title of philosopher, calling himself a *rhetor* instead. All the same, he *was* a philosopher, and it is important to understand the philosophical tradition in which he worked. Bradford was *not* a philosopher in the Greek speculative tradition of Plato, Descartes, Hegel, and Marx: He belonged to the Latin rhetorical tradition of philosophy which includes Cicero, the Renaissance humanists, Montaigne, Giambattista Vico, and David Hume. (Bradford had a

high regard for Hume.) This tradition views transcendent Platonic philosophy as hubristic in its belief that it can grasp the real only by freeing itself from the authority of tradition, the result being a philosophy that is either abstract and empty or self-deceptive in its unwitting incorporation of traditional prejudices even as it disowns them. In this respect, Bradford parted company with Richard Weaver, a fellow Southerner who admired Plato and, therefore, Lincoln's rationalism.

In the Latin humanistic tradition, reason is inseparable from tradition and rhetoric. Truth is not a matter of correspondence with a single fact but an account of the whole, and both philosophy and eloquence aim to comprehend the whole of the topic at hand. Vico says that eloquence is wisdom speaking: a philosophical tradition embracing *sapientia*, *prudentia*, and *eloquentia* together, of which Bradford was a peripatetic icon.

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Is there anything *Chronicles* editors can't speak on?

(Okay, we're still looking for a physicist.)

For a complete list of speakers and topics,
contact Aaron Wolf at (815) 964-5811

Brookfield Revisited

by Michael McMahon

**Letters Between a Victorian Schoolboy
and His Family, 1892-1895**

Edited by David Lisle Crane

Privately published (available through
www.worldwidebooks.com);
433 pp., £35.00



The Golden Year of the Golden Age of Hollywood was, perhaps, 1939. Amongst its many films that have since become classics—including *Gone With the Wind*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Stagecoach*, and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*—was the first (and best) version of James Hilton's novel *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*. The film (like the book) tells the story of the three loves in its hero's life: the boys he teaches, the wife he marries, and the school he serves for a lifetime and whose values he comes to represent. As he ages, Mr. Chips looks back on, and champions, what he thinks of as the golden years of the English public school. It is precisely this era that is covered, as fact, by *Letters Between a Victorian Schoolboy and His Family*. The fictional Mr. Chipping would have been beginning the third of his five decades as a master at the imaginary Brookfield School when the very real—and very small—Tankred Tunstall-Behrens arrived as a boarder at Clifton College, near Bristol, and encountered the Victorian public school myth for himself.

Letters is a remarkable book. David Crane has assembled the complete correspondence between Tankred and his parents, other letters that passed between the family and the school, and a host of associated documents and ephemera including reports, examination papers, and contemporary magazine articles. Nearly a hundred photographs, as well as maps, drawings, and facsimile manuscripts, illustrate and support the text. There is a full critical introduction by Julia Crane, David's wife. The book is annotated, cross-referenced, and indexed in a way that makes its content accessible even to those who know nothing of English his-

tory or culture. And though few of the book's readers will need to turn to the biographical index to discover that "Alfred the Great (849-901)" was "King of the West Saxons," those puzzled by a passing reference to "Blackie" will be as amused as they are enlightened to find him listed as "a Newfield goldfish (d. 1895)." The editing is nothing if not comprehensive, and displays the kind of scholarly attention to detail that you would expect of one who has recently re-edited *The Merry Wives of Windsor* for the Cambridge University Press.

Letters provides an unusually complete picture of upper-middle-class life in late Victorian England. The characters revealed here are very much of their time, but they are not all bound by it, for this was, after all, an age on the very cusp of modernity. On one page, there is a photograph of the boy's aunts Lilian and Mabel pedaling a kind of archaic double-tandem; a few pages later, his mother, Min, is pictured in the open cockpit of a biplane. Min is, in some ways, the most sympathetic character to emerge from the correspondence. The warmth of her personality and her enthusiasm for social justice, democracy, and the emancipation of women remind one very much of her fictional contemporary, Katherine, the short-lived and much-loved wife of Mr. Chips. (Though, had Hilton let Katherine live, it is perhaps unlikely that it would have been so that she could design and patent an "omnidress" to allow women the freedom of movement necessary for their emancipated state. Min did.) Min was much loved, too; not least by her brother, John Tunstall, who wrote with embarrassing intensity to his sister's future husband that "no one on earth was ever more adored by Father, Mother & Brother than my Dear Dear Sister is; we are as completely wrapt up in her, as ever a lover was in the object of his love." Tunstall was writing from New Mexico and could not return to England because of the "extremely critical position of [his] affairs." That, at least, was no exaggeration: He was killed shortly afterward in an incident which started the Lincoln County War and made Billy the Kid a legendary figure.

For all the incidental interests that are touched upon in this collection of letters—the moral, political, and religious preoccupations of the time, and the char-

acters that weave in and out—the real heart of the collection is the struggle of Tankred to work out a relationship with the phenomenon that dominates the book: the Victorian public school. He was sent to one because Leu, his father, had a view of such places which was every bit as romantic as that represented in *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*. For Leu was a foreigner—a German immigrant who was determined to found a family dynasty in his adopted country, untamished in honor and based squarely on the respect he expected from the son who was to be his heir. It must have seemed to him that there was no better place to reinforce such values than Clifton, a school self-consciously founded to provide the expanding empire of Britain with leaders among men. It was, in some ways, a good choice. After all, it was to be an Old Cliftonian, Sir Henry Newbolt, who would later write that most patriotic (and now, sadly, much-mocked) of public-school poems, "Vita Lampada" ("There's a breathless hush in the Close to-night— / Ten to make and the match to win . . ."). The stirring message is also a simple one: that the teamwork, courage, and self-sacrificing stiff-upper-lippery that is practiced on the playing fields of English public schools turn into heroism in time of war.

What Leu failed to realize was that one of the rules binding the whole system together is that even its unjust punishments have to be accepted without complaint. A key strand of the correspondence relates Tankred's moral outrage when he is beaten by his house prefects for some minor offense of which he claims innocence, and his father's rigid defense of the offended honor of his son. Germanic heels dig in, and the letters that fly to and from the school become increasingly heated. Tankred comes very close to being thrown out. On March 10, 1895, Leu writes to his house tutor:

Will you kindly explain to me the powers and limits of power of the VI form boys. Is their serious responsibility supposed to exclude gentlemanly behaviour & permit cowardice? Can a praefect [sic] do no wrong & is therefore unpunishable?—If such is an existing error at Clifton I desire to expose it & have it rectified.

Mr. Borwick replies by return, explaining

how vitally important to the success of the public-school system, here and elsewhere, is the loyal cooperation of every one high and low, with the endeavours of the VI form to maintain a high standard of conduct and manners.

Still, Leu doesn't get the point, and he complains to the headmaster, M.M. Glazebrook, who replies that Tankred

does not take a proper attitude either towards work or towards authority. Instead of accepting instruction and rules of discipline, and making the best of them, as ordinary healthy boys do, he is querulous and critical. It not only makes him unhappy, but deprives him of a large part of the benefit of a public school education.

But term ends, the incident is forgotten, and Tankred survives. It is a survival almost as remarkable as that of the correspondence itself, which David Crane has here assembled in a handsome volume which offers a scholarly yet sensitive insight into the reality behind the English public-school myth.

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Great—and Famous

by Tony Outhwaite

Ray Charles: Man and Music

by Michael Lydon

New York: Riverhead Books;

448 pp., \$27.95



The late 1940's and early 1950's were the heyday of rhythm-and-blues. Singers like Charles Brown, Muddy Waters, B.B. King, Amos Milburn, James Brown, Bobby "Blue" Bland, and others like them were becoming acknowledged masters of the genre, all with readily identifiable musical personalities, while such older big-band blues shouters as Wynonie Harris, Jimmy Witherspoon, Eddie

"Cleanhead" Vinson, and Big Joe Turner, years past their early successes, began to attract the attention of teenaged audiences and re-launch careers in decline. Most of these men were what might be called "urban bluesmen" and worked with instrumental groups that featured tight rhythm sections and jazzy horn arrangements. They sang of problems with women, alcohol, money, or life in general, and their lyrics were sophisticated, philosophical, sometimes quite humorous, and even hilariously bawdy. And most of these men—and others—recorded for one or another of five or six labels: Chess Records of Chicago; King Records of Cincinnati; the Duke or Peacock labels, both owned by Don Robey of Houston; Ahmet Ertegun's Atlantic Records of New York; and two Los Angeles companies, the Bihari Brothers' Modern Records and the Mesner family's Aladdin Records.

Early 1952 found the young bluesman Ray Charles at something of a crossroads: He had spent the formative years of his career imitating both Nat "King" Cole and Charles Brown, elegant and refined singers who accompanied themselves on piano and tended to operate in a trio context. He had worked as pianist, arranger, and sometimes alternate vocalist with singer Lowell Fulson's band since 1950 and functioned, to the musically illiterate Fulson's occasional resentment, as the band's leader. At the very beginning of 1952, Charles had signed a contract with Atlantic Records, but a lack of an identifiable personal style puzzled Ahmet Ertegun and his associates—particularly veteran Kansas City bandleader Jesse Stone, by now serving as Atlantic's artist-and-repertoire director.

That spring, Charles ran into R&B bandleader Johnny Otis in Cincinnati and, in a poorly planned attempt at bidding up his value to Atlantic, persuaded Otis to get him an audition with the temperamental Syd Nathan, president of King Records and regarded as one of the keenest judges of talent in the country. Yet Nathan's snap decision, based on a short studio audition, that he didn't need "a poor man's Charles Brown," as disappointing as it initially was to Charles, can be seen as a key point in the singer's career. Now he would have to continue with Atlantic, at least for the near future, and he would have to come to grips with perhaps the most important decision any singer faces: the aesthetic choice of a personal style, a sound of one's own.

Today, the world knows Ray Charles as a music-industry legend. He has sung blues, ballads, jump tunes, country-and-western, and what some might call pop, yet he always sounds like himself, instantly recognizable; he has been a composer, arranger, bandleader, and both pianist and alto saxophonist, even organist, and has fronted groups ranging from trios to 17-piece jazz bands. He has sung at presidential inaugurations, recorded for charity, guest-hosted "Saturday Night Live," run a string of commercial enterprises, owned his own plane, and done advertising campaigns for Pepsi and for mink coats.

He has seemingly been everywhere and done everything, a star since the late 1950's, and yet even this legend has experienced what an unnamed record-industry sage described as "a time in nearly every artist's career when he or she stops selling records. They may still be great, but the market moves past them." For Charles, this happened around 1977, and the early 1980's became one long slump marked by declining record sales and personal income. Yet in the 1990's, he remains one of the music world's most enduring personalities, constantly on the move, trying new ideas and exploring new possibilities. This restless, inventive man's life and career, from the earliest years of dire poverty in rural north-central Florida during the Depression and World War II to the first hits in the 1950's and on to permanent status as a major box-office figure, is documented in full detail by Michael Lydon in his excellent new biography, *Ray Charles: Man and Music*.

It is to the book's advantage that Lydon, one of the founders of *Rolling Stone* magazine, is himself a musician, because this gives him added insight into the musical life; however, he is also adept at describing what he sees and knows in terms readily understood by the layman. He has spoken with most of Charles' oldest friends, and it is clear from the reactions of such veteran jazzmen as Hank Crawford, Leroy Cooper, Phil Guilbeau, and David "Fathead" Newman that Charles could probably have been one of the world's finest jazz pianists, had he wanted it that way. It also becomes apparent that Charles has never been the easiest of men to deal with. Mercurial, quick to anger and reluctant to forgive, secretive and penurious, often inconsiderate of even those closest to him, he seems to possess a number of the personality traits

common to pampered celebrities, yet there is no denying the astounding track record of carefully planned, arranged, and recorded music, now stretching back 50 years to his first recording of a tune called "Confessin' Blues" for the tiny Down Beat label in Los Angeles late in 1948.

"I never wanted to be famous, but I always wanted to be great," Charles has stated in the past. Yet he has achieved both, and, as Lydon makes clear, "his place in music history is assured: Ray Charles stands beside Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and a handful of others among the presiding geniuses of twentieth-century popular music."

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Man in Search of God

by Jacob Neusner

**The Lord Will Gather Me In:
My Journey to Jewish Orthodoxy**

by David Klinghoffer
New York: The Free Press;
262 pp., \$24.99



A compelling personal narrative about his inner life serves as the occasion for David Klinghoffer to engage in a dialogue with Judaism. His story, weaving the personal with the public, carries him from adoption by a Reform Jewish couple in California to deep reflection on the meaning of "being Jewish" and the interplay of family and faith. What he has discovered in his journey—from secularity to Reform, thence Conservative, and finally a humanistic Orthodoxy—is that Judaism is not a matter of blood and kinship but of faith and love of God. And he spells out precisely what that faith and love comprise.

This is not an autobiography in any narrow sense; Klinghoffer only uses himself as the occasion to tell the story of faith. He states the outcome in these words:

It took a trip to Sweden [where he found his biological mother's fami-

ly had no links to Judaism] to make me realize . . . the error at the heart of the tribal conception of Jewishness, an error I had shared in. It is the belief that blood will persevere in the absence of belief. . . . I became a Jew for one reason: because I reached the conclusion that Judaism is true. . . .

. . . I say that Mt. Sinai is in Stockholm. For me, it is at any rate. Torah has a very good reason for keeping quiet about where the event of Sinai took place: because it happened, and happens, everywhere. . . . For all Jewish souls who have lived after the Exodus, Sinai is not a place, it is an experience. Our Mt. Sinai is wherever we happen to be when we realize about Torah what our earliest spiritual ancestors realized on the day that God's voice whispered to them amid smoke and fire: that Torah is entirely Truth, that it came from God, that it is His Presence in our lives.

I do not think any finer statement of the condition of Judaism has been expressed in Judaic religious writing in American English.

Rejecting (for reasons elaborately set forth) Reform and Conservative Judaism, Klinghoffer, in his choice of Orthodox Judaism as the authentic embodiment of the Torah, should not be classified as just another modish reversioner. He is much too critical to trade the Reform Judaism in which he was raised, and which he found formal and social, for an Orthodoxy of equal formality—but about different things and equivalent tribalism. Indeed, some of the best writing in the book conveys his critique of the Orthodox Judaism he finds as inauthentic as the Reform that he left. And the carefully negotiated position—a brilliant critique of telephone-book Judaism, of doing things by the book without regard to issues of context and meaning—that he assumes in regard to the Halakhic discipline of Judaism will not persuade a considerable sector of Orthodox Judaism today of its authentic Orthodoxy. Klinghoffer's extensive exposition of the thought of Abraham Joshua Heschel's greatest work, *God in Search of Man*, situates him squarely at the center of the observant Judaic consensus today.

Arguments in American Judaism in behalf of religious belief and practice

through personal narrative find their model in Herman Wouk's *This Is My God*, certainly the literary masterpiece of Judaic apologetics in the American language. In the recent past, two significant works have continued this sturdy tradition: Leon Wieseltier's *Kaddish*, about the year he spent in mourning for his father—a work of learning transmuted into religious understanding and conviction—and now Klinghoffer's book. The two bear comparison: Wieseltier is the more learned and illuminating; Klinghoffer, the more painfully self-revealing and therefore humanly the more compelling. Both show how the powerful intellectual gifts of ordinary Jews, not rabbis or professors of Jewish studies, take up the service of the Judaic religious challenge of the hour. These books are classics of Judaic religious expression, testimonies to the vitality and power of the Torah, oral and written, to sanctify the life of holy Israel. With figures such as these engaged by its challenge to intellect and sensibility, Judaism in America enjoys an intellectual renaissance with no parallel in modern times.

For the sake of full disclosure, my own prejudices require exposure. First, Klinghoffer was my student at Brown, but at a point at which what I had to offer and what he sought to discover scarcely intersected; second, in 1954-55, as Heschel's student assistant, I typed *God in Search of Man*, and have always regarded that service to him as the high point of my education at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

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En Garde!

by J.O. Tate

The Fencing Master
by Arturo Pérez-Reverte
New York: Harcourt Brace;
244 pp., \$24.00



There are many good writers active these days, certainly more than enough to keep you busy—if you can

identify them. That's not so easy to do, because the ones who are promoted (make that "expensively touted") are usually (a euphemism for "almost always") not the ones to spend time with. As a rule of thumb, I suggest that writers representing organized political constituencies or identity groups may be safely neglected without even cursory investigation, though the possibility of exception cannot be discounted entirely. You have to watch out, too, for writers who are excessively photogenic, for a glossy image is often the sign of an empty cranium or, worse, an empty book.

There's a confusion here between image and reality, between money and politics, that's often referred to as "the publishing industry," which exists in parallel to "the fashion industry," "the film industry," "the music business," "politics," "culture," and so on. That's a roundabout way of saying that popular success need be neither popular nor successful, in these days of turbo-capitalism. But that's *not* saying that, in simpler days, popular success was not meaningful. Dumas and Dickens and Balzac still compete powerfully for our attention today, and for the same reasons that they competed successfully over a century and a half ago for the allegiance of readers who now fill many cemeteries.

Dead men don't wear plaid, and they don't read novels either, though I think they would like to. Modern people are, or at least have been, readers of novels, and so we have to read them while we have the chance. The international success of the Spaniard Arturo Pérez-Reverte should be no pretext for ignoring him, as, in these perverse days, it might seem to be. Pérez-Reverte's rather shocking appeal is the ultimate in retro-hip: He is not only a storyteller but one who actually writes, as opposed to processing words. And not just that: He seems to be a conscious throwback to the 19th-century narrator, to an essentially romantic conception of the tale—one who invites comparison with such neo-Victorians as George MacDonald Fraser and A.S. Byatt, on the one hand, and Umberto Eco, on the other. Finally, Pérez-Reverte is his own man, and he should be compared to the writers he loves and who have influenced him: Dumas, Balzac, Collins, Conrad, John Buchan, the early Greene, and many another.

His fourth novel published in this country, *The Fencing Master*, perhaps gains in Margaret Jull Costa's translation,

for the title exploits a verbal ambiguity that does not exist in the original, *El maestro de esgrima*. I mean that Don Jaime Astarloa, the protagonist, is both a master of fencing and a master who fences, as the word "fencing" equivocates between gerund and participle. However that may be, *The Fencing Master* is neither offensive nor defensive.

Pérez-Reverte has framed his novels around arcana, areas of expertise that are grounds for intrigue: hence, the melodrama of their unfolding, which is also deceptively serious. Special knowledge is a key to the past, and all of his books are dialectical engagements with the values of the past and with mystery in its serious sense. *The Flanders Panel* (1994) dealt with chess and art; *The Dumas Club* (1997) had to do with bibliophiles and necromancy; *The Seville Communion* (1998) took us through Catholic intrigue and computers. *The Fencing Master* teaches us a lot about that art and the honor that is its attendant value, as well as the political context of late 19th-century Spain.

The Fencing Master blends two stories in order to achieve its dialectical vision. Don Jaime likes to keep his distance from life—he lives for the art of which he is the master. Though the years have passed him by, he still hopes to find "the unstoppable thrust," and he finds by the end that it will have to be improvised in action and not schematically conceived. Even at his age and removal from the ordinary world, he becomes the center of conspiracy, the object of violence, and the subject of seduction. Don Jaime surprises himself and the reader as he responds with everything that his austere code has taught him. Let's say that this line of narrative is melodrama in the best

19th-century sense.

But it's the other line, the social-historical context, that gives the novel its sense of dialectical engagement. The Madrid of 1868 is rife with political intrigue. Though the Don is reticent, he likes to hang out with his cronies at the Café Progreso, where the political speculation and gossip has a Dostoyevskian twist. The monarchist debates the radical as they swap clichés, and their dialogue exists in sync with real social conflict, foreshadowing the Spanish Civil War of the 1930's. (And, by the way, I thought I detected among the received opinions of the left-liberal journalist Cárceles an echo of the progressive patriotism of Flaubert's Monsieur Homais.)

Add to that Pérez-Reverte's ironic style and sly humor, his immersion not only in Spain but in Europe, its geography, history, and culture, and you have sophisticated entertainment that is an instruction in disguise. Pérez-Reverte has sensibility, a sense of the past, a capacity for irony, and the patience for mystery. *The Fencing Master*, like Pérez-Reverte's other books, demonstrates qualities that we would have to look a long way for in American fiction today. The cloak and dagger stuff masks a power of reflection that we might call Cervantean or even Jamesian, but which should perhaps be called Pérez-Revertean instead. This estimable author, unspoiled by his own success, has transformed himself from a journalist to a genuine writer, a man of vision. He won't make Oprah Winfrey's book list, which is only one reason he has made mine.

J.O. Tate is a professor of English at Dowling College on Long Island.

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Principalities & Powers

by Samuel Francis

Appealing to Prurient Interests

In 1857, the House of Lords engaged in a heated debate over a bill sponsored by an organization calling itself by the frank, but nonetheless quaint, name of the “Society for the Suppression of Vice.” The intent of the bill was to control, through legal penalties, the production and sale of “obscene publications,” and despite the high Victorian setting of the debate, enactment of the bill was by no means assured. “Brougham was dubious; Lord Wensleydale considered the common law adequate as it stood,” wrote historian W.L. Burn of the discussion among the peers. But the high point of the controversy arrived when an 85-year-old Tory, Lord Lyndhurst, rose to oppose the bill and read out “a long list of works ranging from the classics to Restoration plays which might be deemed obscene.” Lyndhurst’s tactic infuriated Lord Campbell, the prim Liberal peer who was the principal spokesman for the bill and who promptly denounced Lyndhurst’s “zeal for these filthy publications” and upbraided him for defending the supposed right to engage in “free trade in obscenity.” Lyndhurst rose again to respond that his many years of recounting risqué anecdotes about his own ancestors had jaded his sensibilities to the kind of immorality Lord Campbell was condemning. In the event, for all the controversy and all the confrontation of aristocratic wit with bourgeois moralism, the Obscene Publications Act became law, and what we now know as “Victorianism” acquired one more legal support from the British government.

The debate in the Lords is of interest because it is one of the early occasions of a controversy that has continued down to our own time, and, as the exchange between Lyndhurst and Campbell suggests, the terms of the controversy have not changed and have never been settled. Lyndhurst’s list of classics goes to the heart of the perennial debate over pornography and obscenity, and every time the issue is argued, those opposed to censorship produce a similar list. How do we know what is and what is not “obscene”? How do we know we are not silencing an Aristophanes, a Rabelais, or a Joyce? On the Lyndhurst side of the aisle

is the obvious truth that many of those most zealous to crush obscenity care absolutely nothing for serious literature and art anyway, that to such paragons of virtue and civilization entire libraries are little more than depositories of “filthy publications,” and they would be just as happy to consign Aristophanes, Rabelais, and Joyce to the fire as to shut down the local peep shows and massage parlors.

Yet on the other side is what should be the equally obvious truth that the state has every right to regulate and discipline the private moral life of its citizens. Morally proper behavior is fundamental to the elementary cohesion of human society, not to speak of the higher levels of civilization that most people would like to sustain, and the systematic assault on morality, taste, beauty, and decency that pornography perpetrates is a perfectly appropriate target of public coercion. Opponents are probably right: Sometimes, if you have strict laws against obscenity, you might in error silence a Shakespeare. But, by the same argument, if you have laws against murder, you might sometimes hang an innocent man. Mistakes happen, but as long as procedures exist to control and avoid them, they do not invalidate the legitimacy of the principle.

This summer, the U.S. House of Representatives again took up the debate over obscenity, only this time it was not about sex in books but violence in movies. Rep. Henry Hyde, fresh from the failed crusade to topple Bill Clinton, came up with a measure to save America’s children from Hollywood. The occasion of the Hyde proposal was the massacre in Littleton, Colorado, two months before and the inane compulsion that lawmakers of both parties experienced to “do something” to prevent more Littletons in the future. The favorite such “something” was gun control, but the Republicans quickly managed to fumble that issue and allow the Democrats to upstage and out-manuever them. Mr. Hyde’s measure was driven in large part by the need felt by many Republicans that, if the Democrats were going to “do” gun control, the Republicans must “do” something else, and what Republicans should “do” was attack Hollywood, a whipping boy as popular with the Stupid Party as gun owners are with the Evil. The rele-

vance of outlawing, controlling, or censoring movies, videos, and other media for the purpose of preventing future Littletons was never clear. The whole measure was driven not by any serious desire to avoid such bloodlettings, but by what Republicans were smart enough to recognize as the political necessity that they “do something” but were too dumb and cowardly to resist by exposing as merely a deliberately concocted device to attack private firearm ownership.

Moreover, the language Mr. Hyde drafted and submitted was full of holes. His bill sought to prevent minors under 17 from buying materials containing “obscene violence,” defined as “the kind of violence that appeals to the prurient, morbid or shameful interest of children without social redeeming value for children.” Of course, almost every word in the definition — “prurient,” “morbid,” “shameful,” “redeeming,” and “value,” not to mention “violence” itself — is up for grabs. Like almost all legislation that tries to define and outlaw “obscenity,” whether sexual or violent, Mr. Hyde’s definition contained terms that were themselves open to interpretation and debate and would only have led to an infinitely regressing argument over what was or was not subject to the law.

The Hyde language was clearly derived from the most recent definition of “obscenity” offered by the heavy lifters over at the Supreme Court in the *Miller* decision of 1973. After several rulings in the 1950’s on the issue of “obscenity,” the case of *Miller v. California* settled the matter for at least the last generation. In that decision, Chief Justice Warren Burger’s definition of “obscenity” is that material may be obscene if

- (a) the average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest; (b) the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law; and (c) the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.

The Hyde language is merely an adapta-

tion of the Burger definition applied to violence rather than sex—although Burger repeatedly insisted that “obscenity” referred only to sexual conduct.

The Hyde adaptation is therefore suspect on its face, since violence, even when it is as brutal as Oliver Stone or Steven Spielberg can make it, still isn’t sex (except when it becomes sado-masochism) and simply does not have the implications for personal, family, community, and general societal cohesion that sexuality does. Even so, it may also be noted that the Burger definition, like so much of what the second-rate minds of the courts try to do, is largely useless even for controlling real sexual obscenity. In the first place, the definition is simply too long and cumbersome, is couched in too many qualifications, and again relies on undefined and unclear terms. In addition, the knee-bend to “community standards,” while seemingly a recognition that healthy backwaters like Montana and Alabama may retain the right to control their own public morals, in fact guarantees that the centers of the world pornography industry in Los Angeles and New York may operate without fear and inundate the rest of the country with their products. The “community standards” of the megalopolis are hardly such as to encourage moral uplift.

Mr. Hyde at least spared us the cant and mendacity of the Burger Court’s “community standards,” but his definition was no more useful, even if we grant that his purported purpose of protecting minors from harmful depictions of violence was desirable. It is unquestionable that Hollywood and the mainstream media now regularly crank out the most disgusting and repellent depictions of violence and that immersion in such films by young people is almost certainly unhealthy. What is not clear is whether a harmful level of immersion in these kinds of films is sufficiently common as to constitute a problem of any kind or that the harmful effects of the films reach to matters of public concern—e.g., the committing of crimes or the destabilization or corruption of society. Since Mr. Hyde and his Republican colleagues were far more concerned to perpetuate the illusion that Republicans were just as “sensitive” to Littleton as the Democrats and just as committed to “doing something,” there was no time for any congressional inquiry on the subject. There may be sociological or criminological literature on it, but because there were no

hearings, such materials never made it into the public eye.

Conservatives are undoubtedly fed up with Hollywood—sometimes justifiably so and sometimes not. Whenever I hear conservatives discussing movies, I am invariably struck by the illiteracy and banality of their judgments. Mr. Hyde, asked by the *Wall Street Journal* about which current films he might consider “too violent,” mentioned Mel Gibson’s *Payback* and *The Matrix*. He also remarked that “I’d say that any movie that has more than 50 killings is pushing the envelope.” That, of course, pushes just about any war movie made in the last 50 or 60 years—*Sergeant York*, *Sands of Iwo Jima*, *Spartacus*, *Braveheart*, *Gettysburg*—well outside the envelope.

The problem with Mr. Hyde’s attempt to enforce public morals is not, however, that doing so is impossible or undesirable, nor is the problem only that the real motivation of the Hyde legislation was its transparently cynical but nonetheless fatuous political purpose. The deeper problem with what Mr. Hyde and conservatives in general are trying to do is simply that today there is virtually no public morality to enforce.

Say what you will about Oliver Stone, Madonna, and MTV, the brute fact is that, ever since the 1960’s, sexuality and violence of a level never before permitted have permeated our popular culture. The paperback novels on sale at any Walden’s or B. Dalton’s contain language and behavior that would have been universally banned in the 1950’s. Mainstream movies today—not just Quentin Tarantino’s or John Woo’s—routinely portray murders, tortures, maimings, lethal explosions, mass deaths, and catastrophes, as well as rape, sexual intercourse, sexual jokes, nudity, perversion, and assorted jabber about sex organs and bodily functions, on a scale and in a detail never before permitted. I rehearse these facts not out of any prudish dudgeon—like Lord Lyndhurst, my own sensibilities are far too jaded by exposure to contemporary popular culture to be very concerned about this kind of immorality—but merely to emphasize that any conventional legislative enforcement of public morals today is all but impossible.

The legitimate purpose of legislating against obscenity is not to restore or create a moral consensus where none exists, but to protect an existing consensus against threats from the handful of de-

viant who violate it or want to subvert it. In 1857, when Lords Lyndhurst and Campbell debated, most gentlemen in their civilization on both sides of the Atlantic shared such a consensus, and, for a century or so afterward, enforcement of a public morality that was widely known, understood, and shared remained possible. Lawmakers no more had to worry excessively over the implications of a legal definition of “obscenity” or what terms like “prurient,” “morbid,” “shameful,” or “redeeming” really meant than the Framers of the U.S. Constitution had to explain what “cruel and unusual punishment” or “free exercise” of religion meant. Everyone knew the meaning of these terms; if they didn’t know, they were not part of the common civilization, so their ignorance didn’t much matter.

Today, conservative efforts to enforce morality through the state, like those of Mr. Hyde, suffer from the flaw that we live in a society that has become a moral vacuum and has ceased to be part of a common civilization. This is why courts and lawmakers have so much trouble defining “obscenity” at all. Within the ruling class, at least, the common understandings of morals (not to mention of language itself) have all but vanished. The long shadow of that fate was perhaps beginning to stretch itself when Lord Lyndhurst read out his list of classics that may or may not have been deemed obscene, but in 1857, Western men still generally knew what the term meant and what the moral beliefs they were trying to protect were. Today, we can no longer protect morality through law because no one—including most lawmakers—any longer knows what morality is or should be.

Mr. Hyde may or may not have known what he wanted to accomplish with his proposal, but what his ill-considered measure (had it passed) would probably have done (aside from encouraging Hollywood to produce movies that only children would want to watch) was impose a fake moral code that virtually no one else in the society had thought about, endorsed, practiced, or expressed any desire to accept. He might well have pushed the movies he claimed to dislike out of the envelope, but the “morality” he and his colleagues in the Stupid Party wanted to cram into the nation’s moral vacuum would have been neither a real morality nor even an imitation worth having.

Letter From New York

by J.O. Tate

The Talk of the Town



There have been so many e-mails and cell phones and taped messages and beepers and postcards and mash notes cluttering up my communications that I just haven't been able to keep up with everything that has been happening because I have been so busy at so many gay bars and cigar bars and wine bars and booze bars and singles bars and drug bars and just plain gin mills, what with flying out to the Left Coast and jetting back and forth looking down on the flyovers, what with the Israeli election and then the Knicks and bombing the Serbs and keeping up with the market and cleaning up in those Internet stocks (and who says a Ponzi scheme doesn't work, at least for a while?), that I just haven't been able to get back to all those e-mails and tapes and beeps and what-have-you's to speak *ex cathedra* about the biggest story in New York, and it is a humdinger. So here is my belated response because everybody who is anybody has been asking me even though they don't want me to mention to anybody that they did ask me, so if anybody asks, you didn't hear it from me, nor did I say anything indiscreet about Cameron Diaz or Jennifer Lopez or Denise Richards or Henry Kissinger or any of those lovelies that I hang out with when I am hanging out in the kind of bar that lovelies hang out in, which is most of the time these days.

Sure, they kind of pump up the volume in the places I'm talking about (Turn the beat around! Love to hear percussion!) so it's hard to hear what anybody (not to mention everybody) is saying, but the right drugs clarify your mind. Underneath all the pulsations, what everybody is talking about is Hillary Rodham Clinton, and they have been talking about her so much that she makes Monica Lewinsky, the portly pepperpot of yore, pale by comparison, as they say in the parlance of our times. Went to a

dance, looking for romance, saw Janet Reno and I thought I'd take a chance.

And why, you cautiously inquire, would they be talking so much about Hillary Rodham Clinton? "Because," I crisply respond. Because Hillary *cares*, and because there have been so many articles and press releases and media events and free publicity and nasty attacks that she has been filling up the pages of the New York papers day after day. Hillary is big, Hillary is everywhere, Hillary is what's happening. She is bigger than the market, bigger than fun drugs, bigger than anything. She is the Hamptons, she is Fire Island, she is a gay/lesbian fundraiser, she is the Rev. Al Sharpton blocking a bridge at rush hour and getting away with it, she is the Puerto Rican Day parade, all put together.

Okay, so you get the symbolism. Hillary Rodham Clinton is a "woman" to "women," she is in with the black community, she is in with the ethnics, she is the poster girl of the gay and lesbian community, she is a big deal with the Democrats, and she proved she was effective politically wherever she engaged in 1996. But get this, now. They are talking about her running for the Senate seat being vacated by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, they are talking about the months of phony striptease as she pondered whether to run, they are talking about the dumb arguments about her carpetbagger candidacy, and they are also talking about a matchup with the retiring mayor of New York City, Republican Rudolph Giuliani. Get the picture? Giuliani's highly successful mayoralty has been shadowed not only by his own questionable personality flaws, shaky marriage, fondness for drag shows, etc., but also by highly publicized incidents of police brutality which I won't even get into. You want to linger on shooting an unarmed black man 41 times (not counting the misses) or sodomizing another with a police baton when that is such a suggestive proposition if invited *dans nos jours*? The point is that Rudy is going to have a problem getting the Republican nomination because he is highly independent, alienated from Gov. George Pataki, and the policing success that gave the city so much of what it needed has now been drawn into question and racially charged. Hillary's candidacy was first advanced by Rep. Charles Rangel, so sure,

there is a racial subtext, as there always is.

Now may be the time to mention that Republican Rep. Rick Lazio has let it be known that he is also interested in that Senate race, and in my brief moments of lucidity, I have actually thought that a term in the Senate for him would be in the best interests of the people of New York. Such an outcome is quite possible, but that would be political in the old-fashioned sense. Is there any politics anymore, or is everything just vibrations and projection, wishes and lies? Well, let me ask you another one. Does this stock market relate to dividends and profits and rational analysis? I mean, go figure. The Balkans are in the North Atlantic, right? You better get with it, pal, and fast.

All right, let's cut to the chase. There's a question as to whether Giuliani will run effectively in the 2000 race, but there is no question that Hillary Rodham Clinton has already got the Democratic nomination sewed up. The only other candidate, Rep. Nita Lowey, actually bowed out after a heart-to-heart with Hillary whom we would not pillory, heaven forbid. Women are wonderful, let's face it, and if these two had been men, there might have been unseemly competition or aggression or rational discussion, but everything was just nice and finessed, and there was no problem. This is the politics of the future. This is the politics of the present. This is the politics of no politics at all. Pillow talks, not politics. Making nice. It gives you a warm feeling all over.

The warm feeling all over that Hillary Rodham Clinton inspires in me (if not in others) is a complete nausea combined with an overwhelming fit of the giggles, related perhaps to atavistic reactions such as disgust and indignation connected with surreal/historic memories of the Constitution and the *Federalist*, which as you may remember was first published in New York City to persuade the citizens that approving the Constitution was the right thing to do. Yes, Alexander Hamilton was the founder of the *New York Post*, and I wonder (actually, I don't wonder, I know) what he would think of it today. We've come a long way, baby. I mean, we've got factionalism that would give James Madison hives. But what's worse is that the factionalism isn't based on any identifiable interest except whining and just going on and on about your sexuali-

ty, strangely unmentioned in our founding document.

So there it is. Hillary Rodham Clinton will run, she will be the Democratic nominee, and the betting is that she will win. So fasten your seatbelts, because it's going to be a bumpy ride. I mean, Hillary is going to get a bye from the Democrats because she inspires such feelings of guilt and vicarious identification. Her rhetoric is a real turnoff, a complete novocaine, but it's what people want to hear. Her blather and her *chutzpah* and her lying have inspired no resistance that I know of, except from the Republican neocons whom she has made fools of again and again. I mean, think about it. Her affinity for sanctimonious phonies, her identity with unearned income, and her mastery (mistressy?) of globalist cant are the language of New York and Hollywood and the Beltway. Add to that her unmatched credentials as a manipulator of identity politics, and you have to admit that, though Hillary Rodham Clinton will be a nullity for the people of New York, she speaks fluently the abstract liberal flapdoodle that is the language of the *New York Times* and of the *Post* as well, hostile though the latter has been. She certainly isn't what New York needs. She is, rather, exactly what it deserves.

They are already genuflecting for St. Hillary. Nobody even laughs when she shows up in a factory wearing a pink pantsuit and pearls and a bottle-blonde patina to conduct an Oprah Winfrey-type session with the workers. But not to worry. The hostiles in the *Post* and elsewhere have already announced their agenda. She is going to be asked about those cattle futures, though since the market itself is such a baseless scam, I'm not so sure that the issue will spark. She will be asked about the billing records from the Rose law firm, Whitewater, the White House travel office stuff, and all the rest of it. And then I think she will reply that these matters have been proved to be of no import and insist on not deflecting the discourse from pertinent issues like female circumcision in Africa. Empowering women and children is something that she has been vitally involved in for decades, and that is what her campaign will be all about. And if you are against that, then you are against the vital interests of women and children, their right and need to be governed by women (some of whom are a bit different), and so on. Gay rights are human

rights, and if we have no gay rights, then we have no human rights, *quod erat demonstrandum*. That kind of stuff flies with a lot of Republicans in New York, not to mention Democrats who can't remember when they voted for George Wallace.

I have seen the future, and it doesn't work. That's why I am going to be busier than ever during next year's campaign. A lot of nose candy, a lot of Cuban cigars lit with ignited hundred dollar bills, a lot of hanky panky with those young and restless babes who are between films—that's what it's going to take to get me through the next year with Hillary Rodham Clinton. We'll have fun, fun, fun, till your daddy takes the T-Bird away. Don't stop thinking about tomorrow. I'll be so busy dancing my life away and risking permanent hearing damage that my e-mail and my snail mail will be more neglected than ever. Or, as Austin Powers has succinctly put it, "Oh, behave!"

J.O. Tate is a professor of English at Dowling College on Long Island.

Letter From London

by Michael McMahon

State Education in England, or English Education in a State

◆
*ut vero aliquis libenter educationis
taedium laboremque suscipiat, non
praemiis modo verum etiam exquisitis
adhortationibus impetrandum est.*

—Pliny (I, 8)

Those who read my "Letter From Banauasia" in the June *Chronicles* will perhaps recall that it described the studied destruction of the tradition of learning in English schools and its replacement by politicized, centrist, authoritarian, line-managed training for employment. It reported how the new "educational" orthodoxy is enforced by subjecting schools to the destructive testing methods of a tyrannical and unchallengeable inspectorate. And it related the virtual collapse of secondary-teacher recruitment that has followed these developments, despite the government's attempts to attract appli-

cants by a campaign of sentimentalized cinema and newspaper advertisements. Well, three months later, and—as the venerable Jesuit who taught me English all those years ago would say (daily, in response to the morning's news broadcast on what we then called the "wireless")—"It's getting worse."

In peri-millennial England, it would seem, just as in the Rome of Pliny the Younger, "a good deal of persuasion, not just financial incentives, is needed to get anyone to choose to put up with the boredom and hard work involved in teaching children." The *exquisitae adhortationes* I described in my last dispatch continue, through the inexhaustibly comic catch phrase—still, "Nobody forgets a good teacher!"; still, nobody wants to be one—and now through a comic book, too. For every teacher in England has recently become an involuntary subscriber to a free government-produced journal called *Teachers*, in which the party line is set forth with much of the glossiness of *Cosmopolitan* and with all of the subtlety of *Der Stürmer*.

The first number (Spring 1999) of this humorless and heavily designed magazine is a giveaway in more than one sense. Beside the bright eyes, hope-filled smile, and unwrinkled forehead of its glamorous 20-something cover girl (over 50 percent of serving teachers are over 40, by the way) are five telling headlines. Three of them promise *praemia*: "Pay latest: How to earn £35,000"; "Recruit, retain, reward"—the education minister on his "plans for a modern profession"; and an invitation to "Win a holiday for two in New York!" (To enter this drawing, you have to be a serving teacher who is culturally knowledgeable enough to identify which of three named American TV comedy series is set in that city.) The fourth and fifth headlines are confident *adhortationes* to accept two recent education ministry edicts: that primary-school children should have an hour of prescribed and pre-scripted reading and writing lessons daily ("Literacy Hour: It's their favorite lesson!") and that the number of pupils excluded from schools should be reduced to meet specific targets ("I was a teenage truant . . .") To examine what lies beneath each of these carefully coined headlines is to discover how rapidly the tradition of an English liberal education is being replaced by a market-driven, utilitarian system designed not to encourage thinking but to instill obedience in both teacher and

taught.

How a teacher—or, less misleadingly, *some* teachers—might be able to earn £35,000 a year (half again as much as the current salary for one at the top of the scale and without additional responsibilities) is far from straightforward. A closer look at this carrot reveals it to be a stick. To the general public, the education ministry can say, “Lo, for the teachers asked for more pay, and behold, we offered riches—unto the best of them.” (The best of them, of course, being those who consent, conform, and cooperate with them in their redefinition of what it is to be a teacher.) To the teachers themselves, the ministry says, “Sure, we will consider paying you a bundle—provided you tear up your current contract, and accept even longer working hours, shorter holidays, and—crucially—the principle of payment by results.” (This is what is meant by the mantra of “recruit, retain, reward,” however it might be dressed up and larded by the propagandist’s arrogation of such terms as “professionalism” and “development.”) “Results, of course, like everything else in contemporary education, have to be measured. So we’ll set you personal targets—*moving* targets, that is—and you’ll have to come to us every year with your cap in one hand and a dossier of your achievements in the other and prove to us that you have hit them and are thus worthy of your salary.” Little wonder, then, that the National Union of Teachers has resisted this invitation to subscribe to a deal of such Faustian foolishness, and has for the first time in a generation voted to refuse to cooperate with its political masters.

So much for the inducements which continue to fail to attract intelligent young people to audition for a part in our politicians’ pantomime parody of education. The other two stories flagged on the front of their propaganda comic concern the internal economy of schools. The claim that the virtually inescapable daily “literacy hour” can be children’s “favorite lesson” is no more representative of reality than are the top-of-the-rictus-scale grins on the faces of every teacher and child whose face appears in the magazine. My wife is a primary-school teacher who has to act out this government-scripted charade daily with the pupils in her charge. Whilst it has its good points, it does nothing for the children who have the greatest difficulties in reading and writing, and little for those who have none. Research that shows this is ig-

nored. Moreover, from the first of this month, a second whole hour of each primary schoolchild’s day must now be taught from a government-issue script—“numeracy.” In every corner of the country, children will be lisping in numbers—the same numbers, in response to their teachers’ prompts; the same prompts, as dictated by ministerial ukase. Again, aside from its totalitarian take on education, there is some merit in the scheme, for some; but this teaching of numbers, by numbers, is ultimately *for* numbers—there is no doubt that it will lead to carefully concocted statistical targets being met.

There is further evidence of the “control freakery” we have seen so far under the headline, “I was a teenage truant.” It turns out not to be a story about a recalcitrant child being won over by a charismatic and pastorally minded teacher, but a paean for a school that has improved its attendance figures (authorized and unauthorized) by one percent—yes, one percent—by “focusing their efforts and making the most of innovative new technology.” This turns out to be a £50,000 combination of electronic registers, radio transmitters, pagers, and centralized computers.

The state school attended by two of my four children has a more modest version of such a system. Last term, we received a computer-generated letter informing us that attendance in my son Matthew’s year group was currently running at 88 percent, and his own at 85.98 percent. (Education by numbers, it seems, is nothing if not precise.) “Less than 90 percent attendance for an individual pupil, let alone for a year group as a whole, is a cause for concern,” we read. “We do monitor the situation closely and if there is no improvement over the coming weeks we shall make further contact.” The letter was accompanied by a print-out showing that all of Matthew’s absences had been authorized. We already knew this: He is asthmatic. Supportive though we are of his school, our commitment to it does not extend to calculating how to identify what amounts to 4.02 percent of his school time when his asthma was at its least severe, so that we could send him in to satisfy his teachers’ targets. Our view of Matthew is that he is an individual, not fodder for statistics.

If all this sounds like a catalogue of intrusions and interventions by a centralist, authoritarian, and intolerant government that regards education as a medium

through which its political decisions can be enforced, then that is what it is. If there were ever any doubt about it, it was surely settled recently, when the thought police of the school’s inspectorate visited, and condemned, a school whose particular ethos is the very antithesis of our politicians’ Gradgrindian credo. Summerhill, a coeducational boarding school in Suffolk, is independent in every sense. Founded by the avant-garde educationalist A.S. Neill in the 1920’s, it is the Liberty Hall of the educational world: Lessons are voluntary, and such order and discipline as obtains is achieved by a democratic council of the whole community, adults and children alike. It is not a school to which I would send my own children, even if I could afford the fees. I would, however, defend its right to exist. Right now, Summerhill needs all the defenders it can get. It faces closure. The inspectors condemned the school unequivocally, and no wonder. The framework through which they operate is designed to measure conformity; Summerhill exists to rebut it. You might as well try to measure the temperature of the fire in your hearth with a ruler, or the distance from the earth to the sun with your bathroom scale, as attempt to judge the quality of a school devoted to liberty by employing an instrument used everywhere else to suppress it.

Michael McMahon is a writer who has taught in both state and independent schools in England.

Letter From Venice

by Andrei Navrozov

Guilt by Association



Reading over my last letter from Venice, I spot the word “improbable,” which has somehow slipped in through the barbed-wire fence of watchful Russianness I have been building in order to keep all manner of tripe out of these monthly communications. I am sorry, and promise that nothing of the kind will ever happen again. Never again, in the fortified, hermetic space that is this column, will anybody come across anything that will so much as suggest, for example, that

Everything that happens in Venice has this inherent improbability, of which the gondola, floating, insubstantial, at once romantic and haunting, charming and absurd, is the symbol.

Come to think of it, what I am in a position to offer here is a whole list of specific promises, which may at first sound difficult to fulfill but are perfectly realistic. I promise not to exploit the simile of *trompe-l'oeil* when speaking of "this painted deception," meaning Venice. I undertake never to allude to the "friend of Byron's, the Countess Querini-Benzoni, *la biondina in gondoleta*." And, of course, I will make no reference whatever to the story of the city's founding, apocryphal or not, by refugees from Attila the Hun:

Refugees, fleeing from him on the mainland, sought safety on the fishing islets and began to build their improbable city, houses of wattles and twigs set on piles driven into the mud, "like sea-birds' nests," wrote Cassiodorus.

Equally off-limits will be the city's "eternal present," together with its alleged function as "part museum, part amusement park," and the contention that "the tourist Venice is Venice: the gondolas, the sunsets, the changing light, Florian's, Quadri's, Torcello, Harry's Bar, Murano, Burano, the pigeons, the glass beads, the vaporetto. Venice is a folding picture post-card of itself." More uncompromising still will be the pitiless curtaining off of all mirrors, and possibly of all other reflective surfaces, rather in the manner of the childbirth scene in *War and Peace*. Without such apparently superstitious precautions, the unwary reader might be led to believe that

It is all for the ear and the eye, this city, but primarily for the eye. Built on water, it is an endless succession of reflections and echoes, a mirroring.

And, final and most important, in the months to come, the hoariest platitude of all will be laid bare and obliterated, in this space as in civilized modern minds, this being the view that "*nothing can be said here* (including this statement) *that has not been said before*."

This view, with its parenthetical nod to

Henry James, as well as every single one of the astonishingly banal quotations above, is drawn from Mary McCarthy's slim and influential volume of cultural reportage, which the *New Yorker* first serialized some 40 years ago, *Venice Observed*. When Count V—, a kind neighbor possessed of an inquiring mind and a wholly admirable cook, asked my opinion of the little paperback edition he had lent me, I answered that, despite the recent Hiss revelations, there were some forms of McCarthyism I still found deplorable. Stupid Russian joke, I know, but at least the celebrated authoress would have been offended.

Anyway, here is how the celebrated authoress elaborates that last point, about the utter futility of gazing into Venice's "mirror held up to its own shimmering image":

One gives up the struggle and submits to a classic experience. One accepts the fact that what one is about to feel or say has not only been said before by Goethe or Musset but is on the tip of the tongue of the tourist from Iowa who is alighting in the Piazzetta with his wife in her furpiece and jeweled pin. Those Others, the existential enemy, are here identical with oneself. After a time in Venice, one comes to look with pity on the efforts of the newcomer to disassociate himself from the crowd.

Note the unmistakably McCarthyist touch, so instinctively felt by us Russians. From the cowardly safety of the grave, she is now trying to smear me with the same tar brush she has used on that honest and probably not at all loquacious Iowan. She goes on:

He has found a "little" church—has he?—quite off the beaten track, a real gem, with inlaid colored marbles on a soft dove gray, like a jewel box. He means Santa Maria dei Miracoli. As you name it, his face falls. It is so well known, then? Not to me, baby. We're all red-necks here, for once.

Quite apart from the colossal snootiness—and of the cheapest, bath-and-racquet kind, of course—inherent in this approach to a place of whose very language, after all, this American observer is largely

ignorant, what is culturally catastrophic about her argument is the inevitable companion of country-club snobbery, guidebook materialism. Indeed, much of the book consists of a thinly veiled register of the pictures and architectural monuments she has visited, so that, by implication, the reader can draw the conclusion that once he, too, has seen all there is to see, there will be, logically, no need to stay. To want to stay is to want to disassociate oneself from the crowd, which is at once futile and pitiful. To want to stay is to want to leave New York.

Last week, as it happens, I had to attend the wedding of an American couple held at great expense at the old Rothschild stronghold of Ferrières, near Paris. There were 320 guests, for the most part young, rich New Yorkers. One exception was a 20-year-old Italian, whom I overheard asking the mother of the bride if the château had belonged to her family. Why no, she said, I thought a little too dreamily. Then to the bridegroom's family, he guessed again, helpfully. No, she said, this time a little more firmly. The boy from Treviso thought about her answer for a while, as if wondering whether saying anything else on the subject might not seem impertinent, but curiosity got the better of him. Then why are you having the wedding here, he asked.

You see, it's the material infrastructure that counts, I wanted to shout to him. It's a kind of all-the-madeleine-you-can-eat restaurant they're running over there, don't you understand? An all-the-literary-allusions-you-can-find library. Rent the château, check out the church, recognize the painting—these *are* the associations. Anything else is an endless succession of reflections and echoes, a shimmering mirroring and all that rot.

During cocktails on a famous lawn bounded by a famous lake, I spoke with no fewer than a third of the New York contingent, mostly—like the Italian—out of plain conversational curiosity, as well as the customary order to mingle. Everyone I spoke to was expensively dressed, even beautiful, perfectly behaved, and worked for an American investment bank. But by the end of the second minute of conversation, which, I eventually realized, was the moment they found out that I live (live?) in Venice (Venice, Italy?), each of these bright young things in succession turned on his or her heels and walked away without so much as a pitying glance.

Now fairly desperate, I tried London as

a plausible residence, and this got me to the third minute, but no more. I then tried saying that my parents live in New York, that my wife has an American passport, that I am practically related to the bride, that I promise to name my next child Washington, "D.C. for short," and so on. Useless, pathetic, immature! A salesman of insubstantial, shimmering associations! We've heard it all before! Venice, Italy! He says he lives there!

No stones are so trite as those of Venice, that is, precisely, so well worn. It has been part museum, part amusement park, living off the entrance fees of tourists, ever since the eighteenth century, when its former sources of revenue ran dry.

This I could read in their unamused eyes. Mind you, I had been drinking like a born Venetian, and was hustled off to dinner before one of these conversational engagements could turn into a drunken brawl, so perhaps I was just imagining things.

But anyway, I think this letter is a pretty good folding picture postcard of itself, as a letter from Venice should be. Are you happy, Mary McCarthy?

Andrei Navrozov is Chronicles' European correspondent.

Letter From Lagado

by John N. Frary

Sexual Perversity West of Chicago



This summer, Lagado University established itself as a major player at the cutting edge of American theater. *Angels' Hair for Rent in Calcutta, OH*, written and directed by Jonathan Raspberry, LU Professor of English and Musicology, opened July 24 at the Galaxy Theater and Opera House in Bismarck, North Dakota. This was its first performance since the pioneering rap 'n' roll opera was introduced to an academic public at Lagado University's Lulu Kaposi Thanatopoulos Theatre in May 1998.

The *beau monde* of Bismarck turned out in the tuxedos and gowns it usually reserves for the town's annual New Year's Eve charity ball. The author/director, surveying the crowded theater amidst the camphorated breezes wafting stagewards as the ticket holders flipped quizzically through their programs, predicted that July 24 would be remembered as the day

when he, Jonathan Raspberry, reclaimed North Dakota's theater from stagnation and empty spectacle. Here before them, as he told his cast and supporters, sat a representation of the North Dakotan MTV generation, unconsciously yearning for a Profoundly Meaningful theatrical experience. He felt this, he said, in the very marrow of his bones.

Undeniably the most important theatrical event in the history of Lagado University and of Kafka, South Dakota, *Angels' Hair for Rent in Calcutta, OH* has been hailed by LU's English faculty as "The Analytical/Didactical Rap 'n' Roll Opera of the Millennium." All of his colleagues agree that Raspberry's score achieves the astonishing feat of marrying the traditional American musical's sense of blessing to the postmodernist celebration of blight.

The author draws rich and ironic parallels between the milieu of Rossini's *Barber of Seville* and the gritty, uplifting reality of downtown Kafka's dynamic street life of seedy grad students, nomadic adjuncts, displaced bumpkins, glue-snuffing frat boys, beer-guzzling feedlot attendants, and South Dakota's only transvestite corn and soybean merchant, Sam "Strokes" Stokes.

From this churning social detritus, mixed with the rich compost fermenting inside his own skull, Raspberry grows a rectal thermometer with which to take the moral temperature of contemporary America. Poverty, not abundance, is the musical's issue. It is Christmas, and the holiday provides an ironic frame for the uncharitable events of "... Rent ...," which include the withdrawal of unemployment benefits from a group of aspiring artists and the relentless demands of their ruthlessly greedy landlord that they pay their rent—an obvious impossibility, since the arrears stretch back to 1988.

Every assumption of the traditional musical has been stood on its head. The old romance of triumph has been replaced by the new romance of doom, disease, and despair at the menace of working for a living. In the New Musical, lovers don't meet cute; they meet infected, injected, and dejected. Slocum Tenens (Randy Randome), a young hairdresser impoverished by the bankruptcy of his Seville Salon of Scissors Arts and Wig Rentals, is struggling to construct the perfect toupee before his light is snuffed out when he falls for Miwi (Mary-Trixie Lopez-Gomez), a strung-out "lesbo-dancer" at the Calcutta Koochee-Kooch

THE LU/ENGLISH NEWSLETTER

Although Lagado University in Kafka, South Dakota cannot claim the fame of a Yale, Stanford or Berkeley; its English Department does claim to stay abreast of every slash, gash and laceration of the Postmodernist cutting edge. Our motto says it all: "If it's bleeding in New Haven, then it's hemorrhaging in Kafka, South Dakota." Subscribers to the departmental newsletter will find it an unfailingly reliable entrée to the outré. Our faculty stand ever-alert to decant whole hogsheads of inchoate verbiage over such pustules of coherent thought as may erupt anywhere in the American academy. Subscribe now for your libretto to the Kanondämmerung.

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Truck Stop; both are HIV-positive. The drag queen Lester (Tyrone Chlones) camps up catastrophe in his seduction of Wilbie (the misty-voiced Wambert Weems), an earnest young narratologist who ends up end-up. "Yes, Yes," Lester sings, "I'm a hell of a mess / Under this dress." Igor (the gassy-voiced Damian Hearse), a decomposition artist working in cow cadavers who bears witness to the group's struggles, asks, "What makes a society tick / When it lets you get frightfully sick / Just because you dipped your wick?"

Death, homelessness, and the looming hell of steady employment provide the climate in which this musical lives. The aroma of "... Rent ..." may not be sweet, but neither is it sour. Its combination of gravity and grace is best expressed in the opening of Act II, when 40 latex-clad actors with bullhorns come to the foot of the stage and exuberantly perform "Bon Voyage." The song is a paean to the triumph of eros over a dull straight world. It is also a kind of epitaph:

To pederasty
the kid's a blast; he
looks so cute in his birthday suit
I could swoon, I could flip
What a trip!

To my lover and me,
(the strap makes three)
as we merge with the scourge
and I hear his flesh rip.
What a trip!

To the chain and the whip.
I writhe in their grip
As I beg and blubber
With trembling lip
What a trip!

To sexual diversities
And multiple perversities
To stylish catastrophes
And trendy calamities
To all the fun when the lesions run
And the pus goes drip, drip, drip
God what a trip!

The glittering, inventive score and crisp, juicy lyrics of AHRCO's 83 songs are fortified and augmented by the musical's six hours of dialogue and four of monologue (it has 21 acts, two lunch breaks, two dinner breaks, and six intermissions spaced over two days). This fusion of bulk and density, unheard of and unimagined in the whole history of

American musical theater, allows the author to address every single loathsome horror incipient, inherent, and prevalent in American society in recent decades, and to school the audience in appropriate responses to each one. Hate radio, suffocating sexual puritanism, ubiquitous right-wing militias, private property, violence against women, tobacco, bloody homophobic pogroms, deregulation, the National Rifle Association, tax-cutting agitation, Sen. Jesse Helms, parental consent—all of it—are subjected to the full range of relevant critical theory. And racism, too, of course.

Nor are the traditional favorites neglected: "J. Edgar Hoover in Hell" is one of the most powerful songs in the whole "Rentian" mélange; Richard Nixon's career is covered in 80 verses. In Act 13, the dreams and hungers of decades are gathered into a single lyrical and impassioned hymn of hope: "Your Time Will Come You Right-Wing Scum."

The thoroughness of this deployment and exposition of acceptable sentiments is only the most conspicuous of the many exciting innovations in the Raspberrian repertoire. The director's inclusivity-choreography sets new standards for the American theater. Not only are the play's characters 100 percent HIVite; so is the entire cast! The 1990 census is exactly reflected in an array of talent which is 12.1 percent Afro-American, 9 percent Hispanic-American, 0.3 percent Japanese-American, .00025 percent Samoan, and so forth. (The fractional percentages are obtained by skillful multiple rotation of the understudies.) Most exciting of all, the composition is exactly 3.9 percent Other-American—the first time this voiceless and neglected minority has received the affirmative action so long denied it. Moreover, the set designs are dif-

ferently abled-accessible.

Professor Jonathan Raspberry puts his own single-minded pursuit of his craft, his drive to redeem his time on earth, into Slocum's climactic "Toupee or Not Toupee," an apotheosis that brought tears to every unshut eye in the Lulu Kaposi Thanatopoulos Theatre.

One toupee
Glory
One perfect toupee
Before I cease to be
Glory
One green and purple toupee
Shimmering like a sunset
A bright, eternal flame
On my lover's naked nog-nog.

Angel's Hair for Rent in Calcutta, OH closed at the Galaxy following its first intermission when it was noticed that the audience had failed to return to its seats. The *Bismarck & Burleigh Grangers' Clarion* reviewer completely failed to grasp that he had been witness to the effort of a sophisticated culture trying to create a more inclusive art. His review was the shortest in the *Clarion's* history: "To dismiss AHRCO as a cacophonous pandemonium of polymorphous perversity would be easy. *Vide supra: quod erat faciendum.*"

On July 25, Raspberry informed his colleagues of his unshakable determination to leave North Dakotan theater in the slough of stagnation and vapid spectacles it so richly deserves. If adequate financing can be obtained, he hopes to reopen his musical near-near-off-off Broadway sometime in October.

John N. Frary is a professor of history at Middlesex County College in Edison, New Jersey.

LIBERAL ARTS

CALLING BILL DONOHUE

"In today's Britain, with its post-religious non-culture of sport and superstores, it is not surprising people are attracted by Catholicism. It emphasises age against the cult of youth, authority against anarchy. And confession to a priest is cheaper than psychoanalysis.

"Yet I cannot but regret this fading of the Reformation's legacy. Catholicism is demonstrably not good for developing countries . . . Is it really sensible that a senescent Polish bachelor should have the last word on the reproductive rate of hundreds of millions of women?

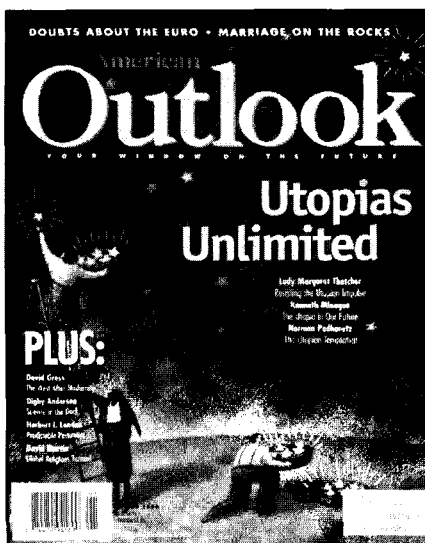
"The link between Protestantism and progress . . . may not be as clear-cut as Max Weber thought . . . But the link between Catholicism and stagnation does seem suspiciously close."

—from Niall Ferguson, "A Catholic Britain would be no cause for rejoicing," *Daily Telegraph* (July 1, 1999)

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FILM

Of Apes and Yahoos

by George McCartney

Instinct

Produced by Spyglass Entertainment
and Touchstone Pictures
Directed by Jon Turteltaub
Screenplay by Gerald Di Pego
and Daniel Quinn
Released by Buena Vista Pictures

Pushing Tin

Produced by Art Linson Productions,
3 Miles Apart Productions Ltd., et al.
Directed by Mike Newell
Screenplay by Darcy Frey
and Glen Charles
Released by 20th Century Fox
Film Corporation

***Star Wars: Episode I—The
Phantom Menace***

Produced by Lucasfilm Ltd.
Directed by George Lucas
Screenplay by George Lucas
Released by 20th Century Fox
Film Corporation

Election

Produced by Bona Fide Productions,
MTV Productions, and
Paramount Pictures
Directed by Alexander Payne
Screenplay by Alexander Payne
and Jim Taylor III; based on
a novel by Tom Perrotta
Released by Paramount Pictures

A scene from director Jon Turteltaub's *Instinct* will set the stage for this month's film homily. We see Anthony Hopkins as primatologist Ethan Powell, his white hair festooned wildly over his beetling brows, his eyes glittering with an obsession worthy of the Ancient Mariner. He is reclining among a tribe of mountain gorillas in their leafy habitat. With rigorous scientific discipline, he's spent

months inching his way into their gentle lives. His full acceptance is now at hand. The head male absently holds out a crooked forefinger and Powell touches it with his own far more eager digit, tip to trembling fingertip in the middle of the screen. It's a perfectly inverted Sistine moment. In place of God imparting spirit to Adam, we have a gorilla bestowing soulful warmth to an icy professional. Michelangelo had it wrong: Real inspiration comes from below, not above. Instead of reaching for our spiritual destiny, we must delve into our animal origins if we want to become whole and saved.

What is it about filmmakers? They have at their disposal a technical art form of staggering ingenuity, yet they're forever urging us to flee our machine-ridden civilization and return to the primal life. Disney expects to make zillions plying this line with Tarzan, its cartoon version of Edgar Rice Burroughs' pulp version of Rousseau's noble savage. No doubt market research indicates Americans are longing for yet another romance of the virtuous primitive. The same nostalgia for primal purity infects three of this month's films—*Instinct*, *Pushing Tin*, and *Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace*. Only the fourth, *Election*, reminds us that snakes lurk in the garden.

Instinct argues that we moderns can only be saved from our hellish technocracy by returning to a prelapsarian harmony with the beasts, in particular gorillas. (Why is it always gorillas? Or bears? Or dolphins? Why can't we watch a big-name star chummy up with crocodiles or horned toads for once?) When Powell is brought back from deepest Africa (that's Rwanda today) snarling in chains for having split a few human skulls, he's thrown into a Florida loony bin. It seems he's been driven mad by humanity's crimes against Mother Nature. Ten thousand years ago, he hisses to his wide-eyed psychiatrist (played by Cuba Gooding with a remarkable lack of therapeutic detachment), humankind knew how to "live in the world" with other creatures. Then some miscreants Powell dubs the "Takers" started interfering with the natural balance by thinking too much. With calculating hubris, they demanded "dominion," the right to use things—wood, stone, beasts—to their own ends. And so we, their descendants, find ourselves outcasts of the original garden.

Of course, what with sabertooths, bacteria, and famine, humans didn't last all that long 10,000 years ago. But no Hobbesian caution about life in the state of nature can deter anyone infected with Rousseau's romance of origins. Such sentimental hankering for the idyllic existence of primitives can only flourish among those comfortably ensconced in civilization. The dignity of life without central heating, indoor plumbing, and Starbuck's on the corner is largely lost on those who have to live it.

Does Turteltaub believe in his markey? Perhaps the credit crawl provides a clue. Here, we discover Hopkins' wild man look is the work of the stylists in the "Hair Department." It takes a good deal of artifice to be quite this natural.

A variant of the noble savage surfaces in Mike Newell's ludicrous *Pushing Tin*. He's Russell Bell, the preternaturally calm flight controller played by Billy Bob Thornton. Unlike his chattering, stressed-out colleagues at the air traffic computer consoles, he's all silent poise as he guides the wide-bodies—"pushes tin," in the profession's argot—through the rancid air over New York. He teaches the value of laid-back competence to a frenetic, stressed-out colleague who is in danger of losing his job. "Thought is your enemy," Thornton counsels sententiously. "You have to let go." Let go? Not while I'm in the air, pal.

Russell derives his peace of mind from his heritage. While his father was Irish, he was fortunate in having a Native American mother. This means he's rooted, closer to nature than others, and much wiser. In the climactic scene, he's shown seated at the controllers' console with a feather over his left ear. I have to say I was offended. Why not a shamrock over his right ear? Is Newell saying we micks lack inner peace? Quick, call the multicultural police.

This nostalgia for primal balance is the one thread of coherence in *Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace*. We meet the wise Jedi warrior, Qui-Gon Jinn, played by Liam Neeson with a gravity some may mistake for somnolence. Against a background of computer-generated images, fission-powered spaceships, and numberless robots, he repeatedly intones this advice to his nine-year-old protégé, Anakin Skywalker: "Stay in the moment. Feel. Trust your

instincts. Don't think." Feelings good, reason bad. Me Tarzan, you mentally frazzled nerd.

I must confess I'm under orders from my own nine-year-old Liam to say nice things about George Lucas's movie. So let me doff my critic's cap and admit that the movie is fun. No, it's not the achievement the first installment was. Yes, its plot is a tortured mess, and the acting is perfunctory at best. But those special effects! They're simply amazing. They cram the screen until you have no choice. You surrender, bedazzled into submission. As for what's going on, it's anybody's guess. Here's mine. The Federation, a supergalactic trade association under the sway of Darth Sidious, wants to impose a tax on commerce across the known universe. The Republic sends two Jedi knights to investigate, but they meet resistance from a villainous viceroy who, despite his green skin, speaks English with a sinister Chinese accent. Is Lucas expressing his displeasure with the IRS and Asian commercial practices? Well, why shouldn't he? It's his film.

As usual with Lucas, it's the simple who are pure of heart. Remember the Ewoks? Here, the Jedi fight against laser guns and high-tech battle droids with nothing more than light sabers. We know their allies, the lizard-like Gungans, are a decent lot because they go to war armed with slingshots, catapults, and other labor-intensive weapons. I was surprised they weren't equipped with bows and arrows. Perhaps Lucas isn't that politically correct.

There have been complaints that Anakin is supposed to be the issue of a virgin birth. This, together with the film's incessant invocation of the pantheistic Force, has led to speculation that Lucas may be cynically mining religious themes to give his romance an unearned mythic aura. This seems too harsh. Lucas is, after all, a fan of Joseph Campbell. And how many modern novels can you name that don't weave references to myth and religion into their symbolic fabric? Let's think positively. Although I teach at an officially Roman Catholic university, few of my students—I'd say about 20 percent—can explain what is meant by the doctrine of the Incarnation. Consoling, those who can are, as often as not, Jewish or Asian. I think we should thank Lucas for providing us with an occasion to discuss the religious and cultural implications of the Virgin Birth.

I've been accusing the films under re-

view with an anti-rational bias, but there's nothing inherently wrong with trusting our instincts now and again. It's the paradox of the medium that interests me. Our most technically based, scientifically demanding art, film nevertheless registers on its audience with a far greater visceral impact than any other medium. It's not like reading a book or looking at a painting. There's no time to reflect on film as we experience it. It sweeps over us with a visual and aural immediacy that all too easily drowns intellectual distinctions. No wonder directors lean toward the sensational. It's the medium's distinctive difference. Then there's the question of audience. To justify its huge expense, even a modest film must lure tens of millions into the theaters. It's not likely that they will all be intellectually curious. Filmmakers know their audience, and they know it pays to flatter it. That's why most movies strongly suggest that life is easy to understand and success doesn't require that you ace your physics exam. Simple is better. The problem, obviously, is that such bias stifles the development of more thoughtful works.

That is why Alexander Payne's *Election* is so welcome. For those who have tired of smarmy tributes to our natural goodness, *Election*'s evident disgust with humanity will come as a positive tonic. This movie is that rare thing in our alternately sappy and sullen popular culture, a genuinely Swiftian satire, relentlessly determined to expose the folly and knavery of our species. No one is flattered, no one is spared.

You wouldn't think a high-school student election campaign would be promising material for a film, but Payne makes it a parable for our shamelessly me-first times. Tracy Flick—Reese Witherspoon in a career-making performance—is running for president, and she is splendidly qualified. Perfect grades, bottomless reserves of energy, politically correct on every issue, supremely organized, she reminds you of what Hillary Clinton must have been at the same age. But her flawless persona disguises another, far less enchanting, young lady—a manipulative cheat who seduces her math teacher, Dave, and calmly watches as both his career and marriage disintegrate in the aftermath. Although Dave's reputation is ruined, Tracy emerges from the scandal untarnished and, more revealingly, untroubled. In a memorably chilly scene, the camera watches over her shoulder as she

uses a computer graphics program to snip her former lover's image from a photograph she's preparing for the yearbook. She performs the amputation as calmly as a young Stalinist sending an inconvenient associate down the memory hole.

Tracy's social studies teacher and Dave's best friend, Jim McAllister, decides to intervene to everyone's edifying discomfiture. Matthew Broderick plays McAllister as an unstable amalgam of slow-footed cunning, nearly desperate naiveté, and profound self-delusion. As he tells us in his ingenuous voice-over narration, he never wanted to be anything other than a teacher imparting knowledge and wisdom to young people. Unfortunately, he possesses precious little of either. While he takes pride in his sunny reasonableness, he is in thrall to his conflicted emotions. When we first meet him, he's asking his civics class to distinguish between morals and ethics. He calls on several students who haltingly try to answer his question. Despite their reluctance, he studiously ignores Tracy's eagerly raised hand. He knows she has the answer, but he doesn't want to hear it from her. His sense of fair play bows to his grudge against this adolescent Circe. It's bad enough she brought his colleague low. What's worse is that, although he despises her (or perhaps because he does), he finds himself lusting after her.

McAllister's ethical lapses are part of a pattern of moral deficiencies. After the erring Dave leaves his wife, Linda, and their infant, McAllister takes time away from his own wife to help the distraught woman. After clearing her bathroom drain one day, he turns to other plumbing needs. As he and Linda tumble to the living room floor in erotic urgency, the camera follows their descent at a discreet distance, finally shooting their writhing forms through the bars of the playpen in which Linda's toddler is standing. It's a disturbing image. On the sound track we hear McAllister, as reasonable as ever, explaining that their feelings took them by surprise. But we know better. We've already seen that they've been maneuvering in this direction for some time. "What had blossomed between Linda and me was too real" to be denied, McAllister rhapsodizes. Sure.

This sour counterpoint between narration and action runs through the film, creating intersections at which reason and impulse collide. In their voice-over commentaries, the characters give them-

selves away time and again, whether it's Tracy praying to God to help her win the election because she is the only one who deserves to, or McAllister assuring us he's at peace with himself as he pummels vending machines or hurls a Pepsi at a passing car. Despite their reasonable discourse, these are people firmly in the grip of their destructively instinctual selves. An image near the film's conclusion makes the point. It's a lingering shot of a mural in the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, an artist's rendering of what pre-humans might have looked like 1.8 million years ago. A man and a woman stand in the tall grass of an East African savannah, scavenging for food. Naked, bestial, brutal and brutalized, they look on with fear and anger as a jackal moves in on an antelope carcass they had intended for their own meal. They provide an all-too-vivid reminder of where we've come from: Two craven creatures on the prowl in a jackal-haunted world, both as ugly as the Ya-hoos with whom Gulliver desperately denied relation. Are these the beings *Instinct's* Ethan Powell had in mind when he spoke admiringly of those who knew how to live in the world?

George McCartney teaches English at St. John's University.

POLITICS

Touring the Arc

by Janet Scott Barlow

In my mind's eye, I have come to see a great arc radiating above the Clinton presidency, an arc of constant existential activity, a zone where effects are received but not transmitted, a curved line on which every American, with the single exception of the President of the United States, occupies a place. One of the many distinctions of the Clinton presidency is that, while every citizen accepts his place on the arc, no citizen is quite sure what he's supposed to be doing there.

On one end of the arc—arc right, we'll call it—are people like me, folks who took one look at Bill Clinton during the 1992 presidential campaign and felt ev-

ery cell in their bodies rebel: *Phony! Fraud! Liar!* The reaction was instinctive, instantaneous, and irrevocable—as involuntary as yanking one's hand from a hot stove. From that very first reaction, nothing awful that Bill Clinton has done has surprised me, although everything awful that he has done has shocked me.

Over on arc left are my opposite: knee-jerk Clinton defenders, those whose visceral loathing is prompted by people whose visceral loathing is prompted by Bill Clinton. This group has a reverse take on the President: Everything awful that he has done has surprised them, but nothing awful that he has done has shocked them.

These two groups, the Clinton loathers and the loathers of the Clinton loathers, have spent the last six years being tested. I can't speak for everyone on arc right, but personally I have found it burdensome and distracting—no fun at all—to carry such negative feelings for a . . . a *politician*, for crying out loud. What's more, it is exhausting, and vaguely embarrassing, to feel one's emotions continually overwhelm one's attempts at reason. On the other hand, I know what I know—you know? So there I am.

As for the occupants of arc left, their fate for letting emotion overwhelm reason is to become public (and, worse, comic) examples of rank hypocrisy. They have defended behavior in this President that has betrayed everything they claim to stand for. My reaction to Bill Clinton is such that my punishment is to have been robbed of intellectual detachment. The left's reaction to people like me is such that their punishment is to have been robbed of principle. It is an essential element of the Clinton experience that the one shared fact of both groups is that neither anticipated such a miserable fate back in 1992.

If there is discomfort at the ends of the arc, there is sheer existential angst at its crest, territory occupied exclusively by people I call the Smarties. Smarties are not dealing with issues so raw as visceral reactions or so blunt as clashing world-views. Rather, they pride themselves on their understanding of nuance and subtlety, their refined insights, broad vision, nimble intellect, and superior intelligence. What we are talking about, in case you haven't guessed, are male journalists—boomers mostly (think Joe Klein, Jonathan Alter, Richard Cohen, Thomas Friedman)—who once saw themselves in Bill Clinton and Bill Clin-

ton in themselves. And make no mistake, they were deeply and completely infatuated with this dual image: We are Clinton; Clinton is us; wow.

Well, the romance has faded, replaced by primal terror. While arc right is smirking, "I told you so," and arc left is hissing some version of "So's your old man," none of it can be heard over the Smarties' great wounded cry: "What in God's name have we gotten ourselves connected with—and by the way, *none* of this is our fault."

With problems coming from all directions (every day, Bill Clinton does something even *more* embarrassing), the Smarties are running out of rationalizations, not that they don't keep trying. It turns out they hitched their wagon not to a star but to a head case, and this knowledge is so terrible, so humiliating, so alien to their self-image that they are blinded to the most obvious sources of insight and resolution. In this case, the most obvious source of insight and resolution is something on the order of: *If you lie down with dogs, you get up with fleas.* But the first problem with Smarties is that they can't recognize a dog. And the second problem is that they think this is the dog's fault. They do not look at Bill Clinton and ask, "How could I have been so wrong?" They ask, "How could he have been so bad?" Scratching away, they protest, "Well, he didn't *look* like a dog, and he didn't *say* he was a dog, so these fleas don't belong on me and probably aren't fleas to begin with." I don't know how this argument impresses dogs, but I'm sure it has no effect whatever on fleas.

Why are these men in such exquisite pain? And I am talking here exclusively about men, because there is something unmistakably gender-specific in their moral and intellectual struggles with the person of Bill Clinton. I think their dilemma goes directly to the definition of manhood and our forced rediscovery, through exposure to the opposite, of what were once known as the manly virtues. Bill Clinton has proved himself to be, in a word, weak. Not flawed: *weak*. Who is impressed by a man's I.Q. while he is wallowing in self-pity? Who thinks of his policy mastery when he betrays his friends? Who gives a damn about his intellect while he lies through his teeth? Who is comfortable knowing that he once admired, if only in a political context, the sex appeal of a President for whom the designation of "sexual lowlife" would be a step up? Who still thinks that

brazenness is courage rather than conceit? Who still believes that a bottomless need for approval leads to anything but a bottomless potential for cravenness? What kind of man publicly humiliates his child?

To have identified with such a person would unnerve anyone. But the problem for the male Smarties isn't that they identified with a flawed President, or even with a lousy excuse for a human being. Their problem is that they identified with a lousy excuse for a man. The vanity-based elitism and self-absorption they shared with Bill Clinton have yielded to a sense of mortification (which is countered at the moment with denial) at their slow discovery that Clinton is, first and always, the very last thing any self-respecting male wants to be: an empty vessel, a figure without honor. Character didn't matter if a man could do the job, remember? It turns out that character *is* the man and the man *is* the job.

A year ago, I thought I knew what I wanted. I wanted Bill Clinton to resign. Failing that, I wanted him removed from office. But he didn't, and he wasn't, and there is a reason for that: We are not finished with him yet; the test isn't over. My personal goal now is to find peace with the knowledge that the awfulness of a President whose televised image makes me want to sail a shoe at the TV is the very awfulness that is creating a most welcome backlash toward human wholesomeness. (Obvious source of insight and resolution: *Everything happens for a reason*.)

Unlike, say, William Bennett, I do not believe Americans are failing a moral challenge. I think we are processing the very unfamiliar experience of being led by a man with virtually no redeeming qualities. That processing is no small deal because the experience is no small event—and the whole business will just take as long as it takes.

We will know we are reaching the blessed end, however, when some Smartie—Jonathan Alter, maybe—stops writing flea-ridden articles about how impeachment was actually a political *positive* for Bill Clinton (“without Lewinsky, the president would have felt no urge to overhaul Social Security. . . . Thanks, girl!”) and gets a grip on his own urge to overhaul reality. I am waiting for the crest of the arc to get active with the hitching up of trousers and the clanking of *cajones* and the deep collective rumbling that real men can feel shame and

they don't make excuses for sissies who can't.

It could happen—it could. As Bill Clinton's presidency has proved, anything is possible. Well, anything with the exception of a change in Jonathan Alter. I think he's just too far gone. Some friend needs to take him aside and repeat, “It was a dog, Jonathan, a dog—d-o-g.”

Janet Scott Barlow writes from Cincinnati, Ohio. Her website, “Out Here: Commentary From Middle America on Politics and Culture,” can be accessed at www.Out-Here.org.

EDUCATION

Teaching the “Unteachable”

by Tim Roberts

On the last day of the school year, I sat at my desk. My students had not yet arrived, and I was considering making a decision that would affect the rest of my life.

The machinery that precipitated my dilemma had been set in motion a year earlier. Having recently earned a B.A. as an evening student, I was about to retire from the New York City Police Department, where I had been employed for the past 20 years as a member of the uniformed force. I planned to attend law school full-time, and subsequently pursue a career in law. But unexpected financial exigencies forced a change in plans. I needed a job.

The New York City Board of Education, facing a teacher shortage, had announced that it would temporarily waive education course requirements—to be fulfilled at a later time—for candidates who met all other eligibility criteria. I decided that, after I had fulfilled those requirements, I would enroll in law school as an evening student. I took the examination for a license to teach social studies in the secondary schools, and passed.

When I appeared at Board of Education headquarters for a teaching assignment, I was directed to the Bureau for the Socially Maladjusted and Emotionally Disturbed (BSMED). I would be teaching boys who, when frustrated, often react violently. For many of them, the

courts had issued PINS (Persons in Need of Supervision) petitions, attesting to the inability of parents, often single, to control their children. The BSMED day schools were all that stood between them and residential correctional institutions located in upstate New York. I was told that teachers' safety was ensured, for although many of the students belonged to street gangs and carried weapons, all were searched upon entering school grounds. Their common practice was to stash their weapons *en route* to school and to recover them after school was out.

As a police officer, I had interacted with many such boys and had been able to establish excellent rapport with this so-called “incorrigible” population. I accepted the appointment.

Preparing for my new career, and without the benefit of education courses, I relied upon A.S. Neill's *Summerhill*, which advocated a humanistic approach to teaching atypical children. I read that work at least a dozen times and memorized every innovative approach suggested.

When I arrived for orientation at my assigned school, the principal informed me that I was to teach a class of 12 seventh-grade youths. All had been held back several times and thus were older than their counterparts in neighborhood schools. He told me that the goals of the program were to reverse socially unacceptable behavior, improve students' reading and math scores, and return students to regular school settings. When I inquired what was meant by “emotionally disturbed,” he responded that I was simply to report behavior of “an extremely bizarre nature” so that the Bureau of Child Guidance, the clinical arm of the program, could dispatch a psychiatrist, psychologist, or psychiatric social worker to evaluate the youngster in question.

When I met my pupils for the first time, I was completely unprepared for their size. Some of them stood almost six feet tall and looked like young adults. I could see, however, expressions of abject fear on their faces. Why, I wondered, should they be afraid of *me*? These were, after all, streetwise kids who didn't flinch readily. I determined to establish a climate in my classroom that was devoid of fear and stress and conducive to learning.

The first two weeks of teaching proved to be the most difficult work of my entire life. Whenever I turned my back, I received a barrage of chalk, erasers, and paper clips, accompanied by shouts of glee

and obscenities. The assistant principal invariably appeared at my door to quiet the class. How, I wondered, could I have been so stupid as to have thought that I was responsible for my students' fears?

I pleaded with the youngsters to give me a chance to help them. I pointed out that additional unacceptable behavior would lead to their removal from family and friends, but my words fell on deaf ears. The school administrators suggested that I detain my students after school for several days. I did, but to no avail.

My next step was to meet with other teachers, some of whom had been teaching socially maladjusted youths for many years. The advice I received floored me. One teacher suggested that I catch a culprit in the act, and "beat the crap out of him in front of the other students." Only then could I expect to earn the respect of my students, for this was the only language they understood. The other teachers nodded in agreement.

The very next morning, as I was escorting my class up to our classroom—an activity I dreaded, for it accentuated my inability to control my students—a fellow teacher whispered to me, "Watch Fred Barnes." The message did not register at once. To be sure, Fred was the tallest and the strongest in the class. He was also the most sullen, and students from other classes invariably lowered their eyes whenever he passed. But his behavior in our classroom did not appear to be different from that of the others. By the time the students were seated, however, the advice had taken hold.

After taking attendance, I approached the chalkboard at an angle that permitted me to see Fred's image reflected in a glass panel in the door. Almost immediately, I saw him point to students seated at the opposite side of the room, and a barrage ensued. This cleared up an important point. It was not their teacher my students feared, but Fred Barnes.

I summarily directed Fred to accompany me out of the room. Without the slightest hesitation, Fred swaggered out with me. I led the boy to the far end of the hall, well out of sight and hearing of the rest of the class. I then positioned him in a corner in order to block his escape and said angrily, "You're going to cut out all that garbage, or I'll make you wish you were never born. Do you understand me?"

Fred's first reaction was to glare back at me. As I waited for his reply, I soon detected a clenching of his fists. As he start-

ed to raise them, I employed a defensive tactic which I had been taught at the police academy and had used on many occasions. Fred Barnes was instantly on his way down to the floor like a sack of potatoes. When I repeated my question, he then replied, "Yeah . . . O.K."

As we walked back to the classroom, I was devastated. I had never condoned the use of corporal punishment, despite the fact that my colleagues did. For me, such reliance on physical force perpetuated the very syndrome that was playing havoc with my students' lives.

When we entered the classroom, the other pupils quickly determined which of us had gotten the better in the altercation. One didn't have to be a genius to do so: Fred's clothes were soiled, mine were not. I approached the chalkboard and, in bold strokes, wrote my name across the face of it. Then I announced that they were going to pretend that this precise moment marked the beginning of the school year. I spelled out the school's goals and then articulated some of my own. First and foremost, they would have to trust me and one another. They could feel free to express whatever they felt without fear of reprisal. For that purpose, I would set aside one 45-minute period each day. I expressed the hope that they would enjoy coming to school and that they could acquire the skills that would enable them to return to their neighborhood schools. Their fixed attention was gratifying indeed.

I determined that most of my students lived in deprivation and uncertainty. I made my classroom as attractive as I could with plants and posters. I promoted a sense of security by establishing a structured environment. Every morning upon their arrival, I would have my students read aloud the list of activities that had been planned for the day and the time allotted for each activity. They were always aware of where they were and what was expected of them.

It soon became clear that the use of regular textbooks was anathema to my students, for it reminded them of past failures. Consequently, I prepared my own materials. Students' names always appeared in reading and math lessons, and often their experiences were central to the activity being studied.

I needed help running off the materials. When I asked for volunteers, every student raised his hand, although it meant coming to school early. I chose Fred Barnes because the boy had been

feeling low. Following that eventful altercation, word had spread that "Mr. Roberts, the new teacher, is one mean son-of-a-b----. He knocked Fred Barnes on his a--." The selection of Fred was my way of restoring some measure of dignity to the boy's shattered image. The expressions on the faces of the rest of the class showed that they understood.

Students' desks were arranged in a semi-circle in order to promote socialization, and the change proved effective, particularly during rap sessions. The format had to be altered during reading and math sessions because of the students' varying degree of competency. After discussing the problem, the students themselves suggested that several levels in math and reading be established. After several months of implementing that practice, I did not discern a single expression of resentment from any student. Academic improvement occurred almost from the outset, and in some cases it was phenomenal. And with their improvement in deportment, I identified several youngsters who might be able to return to their neighborhood schools the next year.

I spent many hours preparing materials that would sustain my students' interest. For example, for a group social studies lesson dealing with transportation, I distributed copies of *My Weekly Reader*. I had removed all references identifying the material as being on a fourth-grade level. The lead story dealt with the introduction of a fast-speed underground conveyor belt that expedited the movement of mail from the General Post Office to local branches throughout New York City. I then passed around a letter I had recently received from a friend in Los Angeles. After reading it to my students, I asked how they thought the letter had been delivered. One student stated that a mail carrier had taken it from the box where it had been posted and had personally delivered it to the building where I lived. The boy had no conception that Los Angeles was 3,000 miles away. Another student believed that a mail carrier from Los Angeles had used his "Jeep" to deliver the letter. I asked for a show of hands from those who had sent or received mail in the past. Not a single hand was raised. I also learned that, except for coming and going to school, none of them had ventured more than a quarter of a mile from home. I decided to do something about this. I obtained permission to take my class to the borough General Post Office.

At the post office, I distributed money for the students to buy stamps. Back in the classroom, I directed them to write letters to one another about satisfying experiences and to mail them on their way home. Several days later, each student read aloud the letter he had received. I then re-distributed the copies of *My Weekly Reader* and resumed the topic. The boys' interest in the subject was appreciably heightened.

Abraham Maslow, the psychologist and educator, coined the term "peak experience" to denote an unforgettable event. Such occurrences could be positive as well as negative. A "peak experience" that had elements of both occurred on the last school day before the Christmas vacation. I had planned a party for my class. Several days earlier, one student had asked me for my shirt size, and I emphatically responded that teachers were not permitted to accept gifts. The students looked at each other in dismay. On the morning of the party, they all arrived with crudely wrapped packages which they placed on my desk. Curiosity took hold, and I unwrapped the largest of them. I did a double-take when I beheld a popular brand of television receiver, the uncanceled price tag from a major department store still attached to it. I did not bother to unwrap the rest of the gifts, returning them all to the students. But I could not find it in my heart to lecture them on the evils of larceny.

In mid-June, another "peak experience" had purely negative consequences for me. I had planned a field trip for my class. We were going to take the Hudson River Day Line boat trip around Manhattan Island, and I was prepared to acquaint them with historical points of interest. Permission slips from parents were forthcoming in short order, except in one case. David Lopez had to be produced several times before his materialized.

When the day of the field trip arrived, all students except David were in bright and early. The class started to leave without him, when he was spotted sauntering toward the school. I ran up the steps and notified the school secretary that David had arrived. Then we were off.

We took public transportation to 42nd Street and Eighth Avenue and walked west toward the Hudson River. At Tenth Avenue, I took a body count, and discovered that David Lopez was missing. Another student divulged that David had bolted, running into a tenement a few yards back. With only a nod to Fred

Barnes, I conveyed the message that he was to supervise the class. Then I took off like a shot after David. I found the boy cowering behind a third-floor stairwell, his body curled in embryonic fashion. When David saw me, he covered his head to ward off the blows that he was certain would follow. Instead, I reached down and cradled the boy in my arms. He burst into tears and blurted out that he had never been on a boat; he was "scared to death." I consoled him and promised not to leave his side. I hugged him, and David responded in kind.

The trip was a huge success . . . for the students. Before it was over, David, in the company of several of his classmates, was prancing about, a smile of satisfaction on his face. For me, however, the image of sheer terror on the face of David Lopez kept returning. Even after having worked with David and the others for almost an entire school year, I had not succeeded in dislodging the fear of physical abuse that plagued these kids. Especially ironic was the fact that David was one of the students I had recommended for a return to his neighborhood school because of the progress he had made.

Moments after my students arrived on this last day of the school year, the bell rang, signaling that the assembly session was about to begin. I escorted my class to its place in the assembly hall, where the entire student body and faculty had already arrived.

The students sang, visiting dignitaries spoke, and then the principal rose to make some announcements. He congratulated the graduating class, most of whom would go on to a special high school under the jurisdiction of BSMED. Then he read the names of those students who had earned the privilege of returning to their neighborhood schools. The few I had recommended were among them. Then there occurred an additional "peak experience" for me. The principal held up a commendation card and announced, "This is for Mr. Roberts and his students. In the last three months, not a single absence has occurred from that class. Congratulations."

My class rose and began to chant in unison, "Mr. Roberts . . . Mr. Roberts . . . Mr. Roberts." Then other classes rose and followed suit. Finally, the teaching staff did the same.

After my students left to begin their summer vacation, I reached into my coat pocket and removed a letter that I had written the previous evening. It was a re-

quest for transfer out of BSMED.

Even as I tore it into shreds, I was not certain I had made the right decision. Perhaps I was deluding myself that my presence really made a difference in the lives of those frightened youngsters.

Tim Roberts is the author of Law Enforcement, Inc. This article is factual; however, in order to preserve student confidentiality, all names, including the author's, have been changed, and references to dates and places have been purposely blurred.

Getting With the Program

by Jeff Minick

Suppose that you are one of five owners of a professional football team, which has just come off a losing season. You and the other disgruntled owners have gathered at a conference table to discuss plans for the next year. The five of you toss around ideas for improvement—a bigger stadium, new uniforms, more strategic game plans, better coaches, more coaches, different pre-game specials, more enthusiastic cheerleaders. Inexplicably, neither you nor the other owners ever blame the players for the losing season. No one holds them accountable, criticizes their devotion to the game, or makes them individually responsible for their level of play. The players never enter the picture.

Would you count on a winning team coming out of such a discussion?

This ludicrous situation is analogous to the intense debate that is repeated every fall across our country, arriving with the "back to school" specials in the newspapers. The topic of this debate is the condition of our public schools; the conference table is the news media; the participants are politicians, administrators, teachers, parents, and news reporters. Year after year, the litany of lamentations around this table is the same. If only we had new school buildings. If only we had more computers. If only we had better books. If only we had better teachers or more teachers. If only we paid our teachers more. If only we had some or all of these things, the argument goes, then our crisis in education would end.

What is not publicly addressed, what

those at the conference table ignore, is the notion that upper-level students—the actual players in the game—should be held accountable for their education.

For the past year, I have taught Latin at Tuscola High School in Waynesville, North Carolina. My previous experience in teaching included a year as a college instructor, several years as an instructor in adult basic education at a nearby prison, and ten years homeschooling my own children as well as tutoring other homeschooling students. Teaching high school offered a new challenge, the chance to discover if I was up to the mark in that regard. Having heard, like all Americans, about disrespect and violence in the schools, I was also somewhat apprehensive about teaching, but I was certain that my enthusiasm for Roman history and Latin would prove infectious.

As the year progressed, I quickly discovered that my apprehensions were misplaced. My students were bright and likable; my biggest discipline problem was talking in class. But what did distress me was an attitude common to nearly all my students, an attitude that, for lack of a better term, I can only describe as “deep apathy,” an apathy that went to the bone. Throughout the year, I rarely saw real enthusiasm for Latin or for any other academic subject. “Boring” was a word I heard a hundred times a day. “This sucks”—applied to everything having to do with school, Latin, lunch, gym class—was the favorite expression of even my best students.

In my war against this apathy, I did win some skirmishes. My students memorized Latin dicta designed to inspire the spirit, maxims such as *Excelsior!* (“Higher!”)—which I made sure my students understood was New York’s state motto, rather than a reference to drugs or alcohol) or *Ad astra per aspera* (“To the stars through difficulties,” referring, of course, to heavenly, rather than Hollywood, bodies). Frequently, when informed by my students that they were bored or that school sucked, I reminded them that they were sitting in a pleasant classroom, reading books and taking notes, whereas many of their contemporaries around the world spent their daylight hours working in a rice paddy up to their knees in water-buffalo waste. One student—a vivacious and outspoken young lady—who told me that Latin was boring seemed taken aback when I replied that her boredom was her problem, that given the limitations of time and the demands of the

school system, I was doing my best to get some Latin into her head. Judging by the expression on her face, I’m not sure that the thought had ever before occurred to this student that the world did not exist solely for her entertainment.

In November, I gave my first-year classes a ten-minute lecture titled “This sucks,” explaining initially that these words once had a definite sexual meaning. When they protested—“Oh, no, Mr. Minick, we don’t use it like that”—my students gave me the opening I wanted. I told them that the original meaning was at least preferable to their own usage, which seemed so filled with contempt and secondhand cynicism. Using “this sucks” as their guiding light, I explained, they were going through high school as if wearing a ball and chain on one foot.

This attitude of deep indifference clearly affected performance. For many of these students, a 50-minute class devoted to real drill, study, and learning seemed beyond their capability. Most of my students wanted an A or B, so long as they didn’t have to do any work to earn it; some seemed to feel that their teachers could somehow tip them over and pour knowledge into their ears. Each day—literally—there were students who asked if we could watch a video instead of studying, who asked if we could build models of the Coliseum, who asked if the class could go outside or to the library, who asked if they could “work with” their neighbor on the lesson. Reflecting this disinterest in school was an inability to complete homework assignments, to spend a few minutes in the evening with the lesson. Waynesville is a small town in the Smoky Mountains, and often students whom I had seen working in the grocery stores, playing soccer, or riding skateboards were the very ones who would tell me the following day in class that they didn’t have time to do their homework.

This past year, Harold Stevenson, a psychologist from the University of Michigan, completed a study of American and East Asian students, including Chinese and Japanese. When asked, “What is the most important thing you can do to improve your academic achievement?” the Asians overwhelmingly thought that hard work was the key to success. On the other hand, students and parents from the United States rated the quality of teaching as the most important factor in learning. Stevenson also found that Westerners, especially Ameri-

cans, were satisfied with their children’s progress, whereas Orientals reported high levels of dissatisfaction. Speaking before the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Stevenson stated that “the East Asian students assumed responsibility for their own progress while the rest let others take responsibility for their performance.”

Doubtless there are numerous factors which have helped foster this lack of personal initiative in some of our teenagers. Television, used like a drug in so many households, encourages a lazy, non-engaged learning style. Our obsession with leisure and sport rather than with learning and hard work sets a poor example for our young people. Our need to blame our mistakes on others—the abundance of lawsuits in the United States is the most glaring example of this tendency—likewise gives our young people the idea that they can blame others when they fail. Our nation’s 20-year love affair with a false concept of self-esteem—trophies all around, “I Am Special” church programs, the ridiculous doting of parents—has lowered standards. Finally, our school systems, by creating the idea that “we will educate your children,” must also bear some fault for the educational passivity of our teenagers.

But these relatively new variables in the education equation, creations of the last 30 years, are obstacles to be overcome, not to be used as excuses. Among the old people who live in my town, there is an expression—“get yourself an education.” Those few students today who take responsibility for their schooling, who work hard, who are aggressive in their learning, deserve our applause. To the great bulk of students who are coasting through school or still waiting for a miracle from the system, I would say: It’s time to wake up. It’s time to “get real.” It’s time to stop working until ten every evening to pay for a car and use your evenings instead for your studies. It’s time to give to learning the same effort you give to basketball or television. It’s time to apply yourself, preferably to the nearest chair, crack open a book, and begin that great adventure which is not your right but your privilege.

It’s time, in short, to get yourself an education.

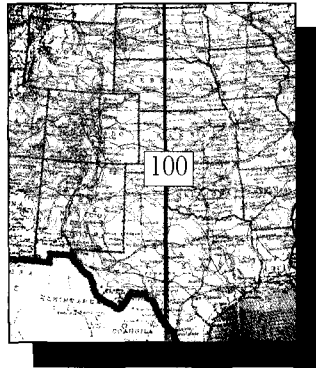
Jeff Minick manages Saints and Scholars Book Co., a resource for Catholic homeschoolers, and teaches Latin in Waynesville, North Carolina.

The Hundredth Meridian

by Chilton Williamson, Jr.

Every Man for Himself

El Paso del Norte . . . the Jornada del Muerto . . . Tiguex . . . Santa Fe: The trip that for Don Juan de Oñate was a weeks-long ordeal up the Rio Grande on the Camino Real in 1598 for me is an hour-and-20-minute flight, including 20 minutes on the ground at Tiguex (better known today as Albuquerque, New Mexico). The Franklin Mountains . . . Sierra Uvas . . . Cooke's Peak away to the west . . . the Black Range . . . the Magdalena Mountains (under the wing, the high park with the observatory at one end where Jim Rauén and I scouted for elk sign a few years ago) . . . Ladrone Peak, concealing, according to legend, a quantity of thieves' gold beneath its sun-blackened folds and wrinkles . . . next, the descent into Albuquerque, step by broad step down a lurching, invisible staircase. There is just enough time for a trip back to the restroom to rub at the coffee stains in my lap with a paper towel before we're airborne again, bucking the westerly winds on climb-out as the plane makes a right turn and resumes following the river north. For miles—five? ten? twenty? it's hard to tell from up here—the Albuquerque of 2010, 2020 is platted westward toward Mt. Taylor, sacred to the Navajo Indians, 70 miles away beyond the Canoncito and Laguna Reservations: dry scratch marks on the burnt and arid desert, vast geometrical petroglyphs whose enigmatic meaning is—what? Catastrophe, I suppose, recalling the Phoenix city fathers—mothers, too—reported to have a similar grid planned as far west as the Colorado River to meet Los Angeles pushing east. I won't be around by then, of course, having gone north instead. The Jemez Mountains . . . Los Alamos, crawling with Chinese spies and sleepy American security men on coffee break . . . snowfields below now, patchy at first, then coming together and spreading north into the San Juan Mountains pushing south from Colorado . . . San Antonio Mountain, the Conejos River and the high San Juans where Dick McIlhenny, Keith Hawkins, and I nearly bagged the Sasquatch last August—ap-



pearing now, in May, like something from the last Ice Age, snowed in for the next ten or twelve thousand years. After a mere three or four generations in the air, humanity is almost totally blasé about the view from 30,000 feet. My fellow passengers sleep, drink Diet Coke, scan fat paperback novels into their motherboarded brains—except one, a Native American gentleman with his nose pressed against the window as if he might actually be seeing the world—*his* world—for the first time. The plane scrapes above Pike's Peak (elev. 14,110), clearing it by only 15,000 feet or so, and soon after is on approach to Denver International Airport on a northeasterly heading.

Viewed from 12,000 feet (or otherwise), the western hub city of Denver scarcely inspires a son of the Old West to stand in his plane seat and yell, "Yippee-yi-yay-OH!" Built on a few dozen piles of whitened buffalo bones after the Civil War, Denver knew its heyday in the Cowtown period, the old town buried completely now beneath the glittering superstructure begun during the energy boom of the 1970's and early 80's and completed by the Colorado-or-Bust! migration of well-to-do Caliphoneyans arriving since then. Today, Denver from the air appears like a vast insect spawn on the face of the prairie, its myriad suburbs and developments laid out in an endlessly repetitive honeycomb pattern—a home for termites, perhaps, or for ants. Raised in the Dantesque environment of Littleton, Colorado, I too might go berserk (though I wouldn't waste my ammunition on teenage girls). While the "lesson of Littleton" is a complicated one, the fundamental message is that modern America has become unlivable. (Another is that white American males have no future in America and are begin-

ning to recognize the fact, but that's another story.)

Faulkner thought the American soil cursed by slavery. As if slavery were the worst thing ever to occur on the North American continent, including the destruction of the Indian peoples, however savage and cruel they might have been. Not to mention quite a number of non-human indigenous species, including the passenger pigeon and the buffalo. In her fine book *The Buffalo Hunters*, Mari Sandoz describes the virtual extinction by white hunters of the bison herds on the Great Plains—millions and millions of animals—over a period of a little less than a decade, beginning in 1876 (a year before the "reconstruction" of the defeated South ended). What happened to the Indians and the buffalo—intimately related in their mutual destruction, as they had been in their aboriginal existence—was not an accidental chapter in American history, but a preview of the modern empire emerging. The colonists arriving in America during the nearly two centuries before the creation of the United States were a different breed from the immigrants who came *after* 1789: the first group more settled (and settling), educated, and pious, concerned with transplanting civilization to the New World; the second rootless and rapacious, exploitive, materialist, and individualistic, interested in escaping Western civilization rather than in recreating it a hemisphere away. The colonists, being civilized people, carried civilization with them; the immigrants, less civilized, brought chaos. The colonists sought remote places in which to worship their God undisturbed; the immigrants hoped to "get ahead," "make something of themselves," exercise their precious "equality" against everyone, especially their betters. From approximately the beginning of the 19th century forward, the immigrants debarking at Boston, New York, and Philadelphia consisted largely of the European peasantry and proletariat; men and women who, whether from the country or the city, had never owned or controlled land—indeed, any natural resources at all. Released into the vast American hin-

terland beyond the Appalachian Mountains and, later, the Mississippi River, they behaved like slum kids set loose in a Mayfair confectionery shop of continental proportions. As the comparison suggests, the determining factor seems to have been class, not culture, race, or ethnicity, the late-arriving Anglo-Saxon-Celtic immigrants having acted as irresponsibly as the newer stock (or more so, Sandoz—herself the daughter of Swiss immigrants—would have said).

How does America in 1999 look to a man who has lived for the past 20 years in a small town in the least populated state in the Union, without a television set or a local movie house, and who travels mainly by pickup truck? Like Denver International Airport, I guess.

Civilization once dominated, without necessarily controlling, the world. At Denver International, nothing controls, in spite of the shiny arcades, polished floors, and all the moving parts. Wogs are everywhere—at the car rental desks, security check-in, out on the tarmac. Also crowds of lazy-looking, slow-spoken and slow-moving, ill-dressed native Americans (but neat, no stains or body odor: everyone hoping and praying to get laid tonight). If the American people are working themselves to the bone, two or three jobs apiece or so we're forever being told, why are more than 50 percent of them overweight? Americans' dress and physical condition suggest they take neither themselves nor anything else seriously, lulled in the torpor of the Mentally Homogenous State. (Mass public education really *works*, contradicting the jacket-and-tie intellectuals who claim human nature possesses a natural defense mechanism against indoctrination, brainwashing, and socially enforced stupidity.) Backlit advertising panels on the walls feature nature, children, romantic love, simplicity: Industrial America paying homage to all those things it's most intent on destroying. "How do you keep in touch with the world around you as it changes?" Thanks, but no thanks. In the news today: The Senate Republicans reverse yesterday's vote on gun control; Robert Rubin, chief architect of our national felicity, will leave Treasury in July. He may yet go down in history as the economy's Thomas Andrews, though escaping, probably, going down *with* it, as Andrews did in the case of his own masterpiece, the *Titanic*. To Hell with the stock market, our national idol. Capitalism has created an illusory world in order

to sell the real one; mass democracy, an illusory universe to sell itself. The wasteland we find ourselves inhabiting is the inevitable result.

By the time I've added the extra insurance ("bumper to bumper") the rental agency man hints I need to have in order to avoid a tolerable chance of ending up owing something like the sticker price on the car, the total amount comes to twice the charge the travel agent quoted me a month ago. It's how we do business in America today, and you give us any back-talk, we'll call security and have you taken out of here (argument being regarded by the authorities nowadays as simply an early stage in the process of going postal). In the parking lot at the end of a bus ride across what appears to be a couple of counties, I'm deposited, without introduction, behind the wheel of a Dodge Something-or-Other (Sprite? No, that's the soft drink) and a dashboard bearing no resemblance whatsoever to my '88 Ford truck's. They might as well have given me a Stealth Bomber to pilot as this Dodge Spud. (Greyish tan, elongated, and lumpy, the car resembles nothing so much as a freshly dug potato.) It takes 15 minutes to discover how to turn the lights on, and I'm launched then, into the penumbra of the coming Rocky Mountain night, the weird sci-fi landscape—not urban, not suburban—that is becoming America.

Since the collapse of antiquity, its retreat to the monasteries and feudal estates of Western Europe, the history of the West has been the idolization—and the idealization—of material wealth, against which Christianity, for one, has had a tough time competing. Alchemy—the quest to turn dross into gold—didn't end with the Middle Ages; it just changed its name and moved out of a basement address. Alchemy, not Christianity or even science, is the true history of the past 1,000 years. The New World was no sooner discovered than it became recognized as man's ultimate treasure, the Golden Continent; later in its history, gold, already idealized, became abstracted, through paper money first, then stocks and bonds, the new alchemy; the final step has been off the Gold Standard and up to the Golden Dow. That's progress, after all. And who, in our wonderfully modern, secularized, and enlightened America, has actually seen or even heard of a golden buffalo calf—Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, or Other—confidently awaiting the daily sacrifice

on the national altars?

Modern Western culture, like every culture in history, has its momentum, its trajectory, before which Americans—now more than ever—refuse to stop, look, and listen. There's a train wreck in store along the track: our *real* rendezvous with destiny. The Civil War and its aftermath, not the Missouri Compromise, was the "firebell in the night"; having been rung so often since, it is today as cracked as the Liberty Bell. Americans, for the most part, pay no attention. Sometimes it seems that, in spite of a population of 265 millions and counting, there is no one at home in America.

The motel at the Loveland exchange is nearly deserted, but a single room costs \$50-plus. When I go for breakfast next morning it is snowing, which the manager, a Polish immigrant, isn't thrilled by. Looks good to me, though—another immigrant (from New Mexico, in this case) who's had enough sun this past 22 months to satisfy a thousand mad dogs and 50,000 Englishmen. From Fort Collins, Colorado, to Laramie, Wyoming, is a distance of 80 miles and 2,000 vertical feet through broken red hills dotted with black juniper trees, separated by grassy swales fresh and green-looking beneath a covering of wet May snow. South and northwest are the high, snow-covered mountains of Estes Park and the Snowy Range pushing up into Wyoming from Colorado. A brief halt across the state line to get out of the car, kiss the ground, and do what men so easily and uncomplicatedly do, outpacing the female sex yet again—and onward, following the snow-slick curves up to Tie Siding at the southern end of the Laramie Plain. Good grass here, real turf, and black forested mountains beyond, full of snow. The dashboard shows an exterior temperature of 41 degrees: Paradise is a cold day in Heaven. . . . More grass, a few ranches, the railroad running beside the two-lane. . . . At last, a view of Laramie, Wyoming—my new home—established on the east side of the valley against the low north-running ridge, a part of the Medicine Bow. . . . Fairgrounds, railroad yards, the tall sandstone spire of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church rising above a community of about 27,000 souls. That's too many people still, but a big improvement over Las Cruces (pop. 78,000 minus the university). In today's insane and overcrowded world, one needs to be grateful for smaller and smaller favors.

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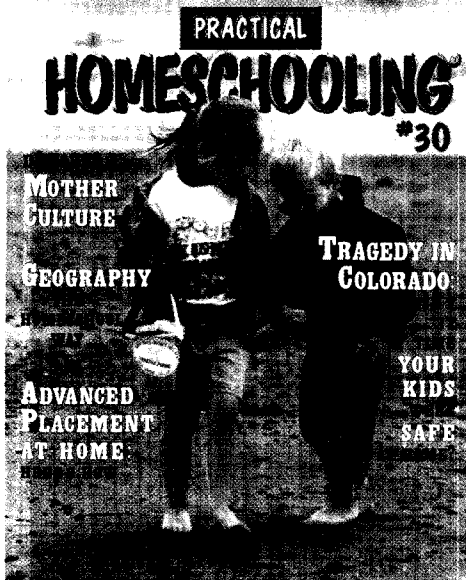
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